







### Ethiopia Stretches out her Hands unto God

From the painting by a native artist in the collection of the Author,  
depicting the Coronation of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie the  
First by the mythical figure of Ethiopia.

*Frontispiece*

# ABYSSINIAN ADVENTURE

*by*

GEOFFREY HARMSWORTH

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*To my*  
**MOTHER and FATHER**

*The author wishes to express  
his thanks to Wardour Films,  
Ltd., for permission to reproduce  
several of their stills from the  
film "Abyssinia"*

## INTRODUCTION

THE hideous spectre of war is again stalking through the land. As I write, the newsboys are shouting, "Italy invades Abyssinia!" and the posters, in bold red type, confirm the awful truth. It would be very easy and rather ridiculous for me to say at this stage, "I told you so." I had exceptional opportunities for studying the probable course of events at close hand, and on April 10th, 1935, my first dispatch from Eritrea appeared in the *Daily Mail*, in which I said: "The Duce definitely means business this time . . . even if it means waiting till October." I am not seeking to parade myself as a political prophet, because a good many people besides myself (and Mussolini) knew that the African massacre would commence in the first week of October. After all, nobody can accuse Mussolini of bluffing. His intentions, ever since the already forgotten Wal Wal affair, have been perfectly transparent. That for some time past he has been suffering from what the French call *folie de grandeur* has also been abundantly clear to anyone who has read his bombastic utterances during the past twelve months.

Our own part in this horrible business has not been an entirely creditable one. We have only to go back as recently as 1925 to find that the British Ambassador in Rome and the Italian Prime Minister were exchanging Notes concerning the Italian "sphere of influence" in Ethiopia and Great Britain's "hydraulic interests" in Lake Tana. Sir Ronald Graham referred to "the relations of mutual confidence so happily existing between our two governments." Signor Mussolini, in

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language so restrained that to-day he would hardly recognize his own words, replied that "it is my conviction that such co-operation will be the more useful the further it is extended." This exchange of Notes, stripped of their grandiose expressions of good faith, couched in phrases only intelligible to professional diplomatists, meant in the plain language of the Man in the Street that two greedy nations proposed, with each other's assistance, to indulge in a snatch and grab raid on an unarmed and primitive people, and that afterwards, with a further exchange of Notes, they proposed to divide the swag.

It so happened that the Regent of Ethiopia saw through this plan and promptly, and very rightly, lodged a complaint with the League of Nations, in just the same way as we would inform the police-station if we overheard two burglars planning a robbery on our house. Ras Tafari (the present Emperor, Haile Selassie the First), wrote to the British Minister at Addis Ababa: "We should never have suspected," he said, "that the British Government would come to an agreement with another Government regarding the Lake." The two conspirators, having been caught in the act, pleaded with superb effrontery their complete innocence of intentions "to divide the country economically." Sir Austen Chamberlain solemnly declared that "the Abyssinian Government had a perfect right to judge what was in the interests of Abyssinia." The remark was a gracious gesture on the part of the British Foreign Minister. Signor Mussolini also furnished similar assurances of his purely unselfish motives towards Abyssinia.

The negotiations proved abortive. The two governments thereafter decided to pursue separate policies of Imperialistic penetration, and in 1928 Italy and Abyssinia signed a treaty of friendship which, as far as Italy was concerned, was nothing more than another

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scrap of paper. Mussolini was beginning to grow impatient. In 1929 Italy was already going through a period of acute economic distress. The Duce had for long dreamed of a new Roman Empire extending from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. The only way to make room in the world for his bonus babies and to remove the scourge of unemployment was to destroy, with the aid of poison gas, thermite bombs and machine-guns, the people of another country, and to kill off his own "out-of-works" in a glorious colonial war. Thus it came about that on December 5th, 1934, the world first heard of Wal Wal.

There is no need to catalogue the course of events of the last ten months. But let me stress again the fact that Britain's part in this shameful adventure does not bear too close inspection. As I write, Mr. Eden is showing great courage at Geneva, but it is surely rather late in the day to try to stir the peoples of the world to a realization of the moral wickedness of this brutal attack on Ethiopia. Last July the National Government imposed an embargo on the export of arms and ammunition to Abyssinia and to Italy, well knowing that the Abyssinians would be the chief sufferers. At the same time, Great Britain sold her old ships to Mussolini so that Italian troops could be hurried to the seat of war. And in order that those ships could move the more quickly, English mines supplied the necessary coal. The National Government, like Nelson, put the telescope to its blind eye.

I shall have more to say about the moral and political issue later. And now, what of my own ABYSSINIAN ADVENTURE? When I re-read my diaries of the last few months, in Abyssinia, Eritrea and Somalia, I sometimes wonder whether I have been a little frivolous, and guilty, perhaps, of regarding my job as Special Correspondent of the *Daily Mail* a little too lightly. I

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was sent to find a war, but I found there were other things to interest me. I was sent out to look for a nation of savages ruled over by a black Al Capone. I found instead, a people of culture and of a great devoutness, whose destinies were being watched over by a man of outstanding abilities, of great charm, and of untiring devotion to his office. In Italian territory I was received with courtesy and suspicion. Mussolini, for very sufficient reason, did not want newspaper correspondents to pry into his private affairs in Africa. That I was the only journalist permitted to visit Eritrea and Somalia before the commencement of hostilities was a privilege for which I have to thank Signor Mussolini himself.

Here I may be permitted, I hope, to make an observation about the work of a Special Correspondent on a mission of the kind with which I was entrusted. My experience was this : I found that no one, with the possible exception of the Emperor himself, treated me, a journalist, quite as a fellow human being. It is not necessary to go to Africa, perhaps, to discover that people react in strange and wonderful ways when they are confronted with "the Press." There are those who recoil almost to the point of rudeness, and there are others who are embarrassingly attentive. For these reasons I always find it best to try to conceal my profession, an endeavour which is not so simply achieved if you are blessed or afflicted, as the case may be, with what is known in Fleet Street as "the Harmsworth face."

Another observation I would like to make refers to travel as a whole, and to authors in particular. It seems to me that not nearly enough is recorded about the boredom of travel. I hope this remark does not sound blasé. In the pages of this book it will be found that I have a lot to say about this aspect of travel. There were moments when I sympathized with a certain

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character in a French novel who felt that he could not face the fatigue and the uncertainties of travel, although he loved the smell of ships, the noise of trains, the impertinence of Custom officials, and he therefore worked out an ingenious make-believe which gave him all the pleasures of travel without stirring outside his front door. He had his house fitted up like the interior of a liner, and when he looked out of the port-hole in the dining saloon he saw toy ships being mechanically propelled across synthetic horizons. His servants were dressed as sailors, and he would spend many hours poring over time-tables, maps and lists of hotels. Cabin trunks and cases covered with foreign labels littered up his hall, and he made use of every accessory of travel to convince himself that he actually was engaged upon heroic adventures on uncharted seas. There were times, as I shall reveal, when I wished that I could have done the same.

In a review of a recent book of travel the reviewer remarked that literary travellers of the younger generation can be divided into two distinct categories, the "Reds" and the "Whites," the "Mayfairies" and the "Bloomsburies." The "Whites," he observed, "travel luxuriously, do not bother about languages, indulge in huntin', shootin' and fishin', and/or the study of art and architecture, aided by Baedeker." They discover friends, he continued, of "gossip column" value in the remotest wilds, and on arriving in some minor capital are apt to observe: "I did what I suppose everyone does on such occasions. I put on my old school tie and went round to call at the Legation."

The "Bloomsburies," he observed, invariably "go native," grow beards, travel third, study situations "on the spot," and studiously avoid any reference to objects of interest. A glance at the index of this book clearly indicates into which category I am supposed to fall.



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It will be seen that my "bag" includes an Emperor, two ex-Kings, the Pope, Bernard Shaw, and quite a lot of other people of gossip column value. I go so far as to call on Ambassadors, Governors-General, Cabinet Ministers, Bishops and Gun-Runners, although I am quite certain that I forgot to wear my old school tie.

But worse, I go huntin' and shootin', *and* study art and architecture, *and* travel luxuriously, *and* do not bother about languages. On examination of myself, however, I find that I am not altogether "Red" or entirely "White" ; or exactly "Bloomsbury" or genuinely "May-fair" ; but a kind of Maida Vale, pinky-grey colour. Let me make myself more clear. I set forth on this adventure with certain advantages that are not given to every Special Correspondent. My Fleet Street passport with the words *Daily Mail* therein, proved a universal "Open Sesame." The generosity of my employers made it possible for me to travel by air where others would have to console themselves with dreary days at sea. My bag contained letters of introduction which unlocked the doors of the great. Where others would have to wait in ante-rooms, I was admitted to the presence. Now, if the Emperor of Abyssinia invited you to dinner, would you say no? Or if the King of Spain asked you to go and see him, would you excuse yourself on the grounds that you never accept invitations from crowned heads? And is it necessary to grow a beard and travel third to extract the last morsel of enjoyment from foreign travel? It seems to me that there is as much hypocrisy about this kind of thing as there is about modern art and modern music.

And now for an apology.

The reason why I wrote *ABYSSINIAN ADVENTURE* was to satisfy the host of questioners who besieged me with silly, if polite inquiries, like: "Do tell me about

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Abyssinia?" "Are they *really* savages?" and so on. On my return from those remote regions I found that I had suddenly become an interesting person. I was "in the know." I was asked out to lunch and dinner and for week-ends by people I had never heard of, and who had never heard of me, till my dispatches started to appear in the *Daily Mail*. Even my own friends became tiresomely friendly. Special Correspondents about to go out to Addis Ababa—there are nearly a hundred of them there now—asked me for my advice about revolvers, quinine and mosquito-nets. I was invited to lecture, to broadcast, and to make after-dinner speeches to people who thought that Abyssinia was some new kind of cocktail. In the end I decided that it would be simpler for everyone concerned if I wrote a book about it. And this is my only excuse for inflicting ABYSSINIAN ADVENTURE on the public.

One last word, for which I make no apology. I am not going to conclude with a long list of acknowledgments. The reason for this omission is that there is really only one person to whom I should say "Thank you." I refer, of course, to Lord Rothermere. All there is in this ABYSSINIAN ADVENTURE is due to his foresight, his courage, his proverbial generosity, and his constant encouragement. He opened the doors, he spoke the word (and made even Mussolini listen), he valued my opinion and he allowed me to express my own views in his newspapers, although they were sometimes immediately opposed to his.

When I am asked my opinion about this Abyssinian tragedy I always reply: "If we had observed the warning of Lord Rothermere three years ago, we would have a Navy, Army and Air Force to-day second to none, and then neither Mussolini nor Hitler would have dared raise his voice to threaten the peace of the world."

GEOFFREY HARMSWORTH,

*October 3rd, 1935.*



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**PART ONE**

***SALUTO AL DUCE***



*“Was not combat always the final goal of all your hope ! To those who claim to stop you by documents or words you will reply with the heroic word of the first Squadron ‘Action’ and we shall move against anyone, no matter of what colour, who tries to oppose us.”*

MUSSOLINI TO THE BLACKSHIRTS,  
AT EBOLI, *July 6th, 1935.*

## CHAPTER I

### THE FIRST ADOWA

“CAN you leave for Abyssinia to-morrow? You can get your kit out there. Too expensive here, and they always tell you the wrong things. You’ll need a visa, of course, and I am arranging for Count Ciano in Rome, Mussolini’s son-in-law, to give you a pass to visit Eritrea and Somaliland. You’ll be the only journalist in the world the Duce is allowing to go there. You’d better get vaccinated too.”

The speaker was the Editor of the *Daily Mail*, the scene Northcliffe House, the date some time in December 1934. The world had just realized there was a country called Abyssinia somewhere in the heart of Africa, with a ruler who called himself the Lion of Judah, and claimed to be descended from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. This dusky potentate had come to blows with one of his neighbours, no less a person than Benito Mussolini, and there had been a lot of back-biting and mud-slinging on both sides. The name of the place concerned, Wal Wal, had, however, caught the public imagination more than the incident itself.

I must confess that I only had a very hazy idea at that time as to where Abyssinia was, and I had certainly never heard of Eritrea. Somaliland I dimly associated with the Mad Mullah, but it was news to me that Mussolini had his finger in that pie too. It may have been the fog outside, or the thought of January 1st and its inevitable financial crisis (it wasn’t entirely the spirit of adventure), or it may have been the fact that

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I never know how to say no to an Editor ; anyway, I said yes.

A day passed, a week, a month. I had seen Signor Grandi, who had been very cordial and said he wished that he could accompany me. The Ethiopian Legation had stamped a superb design of crowns, lions, and angels in my passport. I had had several billion ferocious germs pumped into my arm, and had laid at death's door while the doctor reassured me that I had "taken well." I had also bought a very cheap and entirely useless haversack at a shop in the Strand ("Lease expiring ; compelled to sell at knockout prices.") The map of Africa I had studied very closely, and an ancient guide-book joyfully informed me that Massowah, the chief port of Eritrea, had a summer temperature of 120 degrees in the shade.

Meantime there had been a lot of talk about "apologies" and "compensation" and "arbitration" and "acts of aggression." The Wal Wal affair had developed into a game of diplomatic touch-last between Duce and Lion of Judah. They were beginning to behave like a pair of small boys caught in the act of stealing plums. Each said the other had done it. "You did it !" "I didn't !" "I say you *did* !" "I say I *didn't* !" they shouted at one another. The real trouble was that it was the last plum on the tree, although there was no doubt as to whom the plum had belonged from time immemorial.

At the end of January there was another "incident." Things were beginning to look ugly. Two divisions were called up by Mussolini and large quantities of war materials were dispatched post-haste to Africa. The talk of "arbitration" had now been replaced by "precautionary measures." Each side continued to howl, "You did it !" "I didn't !" "I say you *did* !" "I say I *didn't* !" The Lion of Judah, it is only fair to

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record, kept his temper admirably. The Duce began to make speeches like the Kaiser before the War.

By the end of February relations between the two Governments had not improved. Both sides were obviously preparing for "any eventuality." The Italian Press, controlled and edited by Mussolini's rubber-stamps, devoted pages of illustrations depicting stirring scenes at Naples, the new "gateway to Africa," as Italy's bronzed sons shouted "*Du-ce, Du-ce, Du-ce!*" and sailed away to a second and glorious Adowa. The English Press, on the other hand, remained serenely calm and enlightened its public about Africa's last Black Empire, where the Middle Ages still survived, and likened it to "a treasure-house locked since the beginning of time." The Emperor's photograph (which has brought more converts to the Abyssinian side than any bellicose utterances of Mussolini) depicted a man with the gentle features of a prophet, a little Semitic, sad and brooding.

So far, the war was being waged in the offices of the newspapers. The German Press, controlled and edited by Hitler's rubber-stamps, reported riots in Italy. Germany had her own particular reasons for watching the situation with considerable interest. The French "Arms-Press" vigorously supported the idea of an Italian conquest of Abyssinia. Uncle Sam watched from afar, chewing his cigar and forgetting that he had signed a scrap of paper called the Kellogg Pact, and urged America, in the language of the British Black-shirts, to "keep out of it." From day to day the Italian Press complained of new frontier incidents, gilded, if not actually manufactured, by the Propaganda Ministry in Rome. But there was still no talk of Italy's "complete political and economical control" of Abyssinia. "I desire to be reproached," pleaded Mussolini, "for having erred on the side of excess and never for having fallen

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short when the security of our colonies and the life, be it only of one of our home or native troops, may be at stake."

At the beginning of March I received the word "Go" from the Editor of the *Daily Mail*. A few hours later I was sitting in a corner seat of the Rome Express, devouring early and rather inaccurate books about Abyssinia while we sped through Mediterranean sunshine and the flower-decked platforms of Santa Margherita and Rapallo. Much of this literature was very heavy meat indeed, but the more recent and picturesque events I found easy and pleasant to digest. I marvelled at my own ignorance. Why was it that, hitherto, Sunday, March 1st, 1896, had meant nothing to me at all, and yet if I mentioned it to the prosperous-looking Italian sitting opposite me with a mysterious little badge in his button-hole he would have furrowed his brow and scowled, "Mussolini will avenge Adowa"? No Italian can hear that name without a sense of loathing and trampled pride stirring within him. He knows that, despite what Mussolini may say to-day, the Adowa of 1896 is a blot on Italy's history. It was perhaps the most serious defeat any Italian army has ever experienced.

True, on that occasion the Italians were outnumbered by the Abyssinians by four to one, and their supply of rifles and ammunition was hopelessly inadequate. But apart from the immeasurable advantage which the Abyssinians had in fighting on ground of which they knew every rock and boulder, they were unquestionably better armed. Their quick-firing Hotchkiss guns worked incalculable harm. For some reason which has never been adequately explained, General Baratieri, who was in command of the Italian troops, failed to take up his agreed position in the centre of the Italian divisions at the opening of the battle. This had



The Emperor Menelik the Second



The Duke of Harar, second son of the Emperor Haile Selassie

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disastrous results. The left wing was quickly surrounded by the Abyssinians and was compelled to surrender. At 6 o'clock in the morning there were 70,000 Abyssinians under the Emperor Menelik ready for the attack. By 11 o'clock this number was increased to 120,000 fighting men, the remainder having spent the previous night at Axum, the Holy City of Abyssinia, where a great religious feast was being celebrated. By this time, General Baratieri was in flight, seeing one after another of his divisions surrounded by the Abyssinians, who swarmed like locusts over the high and difficult ground. The Italians were almost at the end of their ammunition. The Abyssinians still had 3,000,000 rounds of ammunition after the battle was over.

But the worst was yet to come. The native soldiers who had fought against the Abyssinians and had been captured by their countrymen were sentenced to the barbaric punishment of mutilation. This consists in cutting off the right hand and left foot, a special form of punishment reserved, since time immemorial, for the crime of theft, sacrilege, and treason. The Emperor Menelik was said to have strongly opposed the carrying out of this brutal sentence, but he was overruled by the powerful Rases.

Wylde realistically describes the horrible business in his "Modern Abyssinia" :

"The sentence was carried out in the different camps, but nearly eight hundred of them were operated on at the same place, on the slope from Fremona down to the Assam Selado river, and the several hands and feet put in a pile. I saw it when I visited Adowa, a rotting heap of ghastly remnants. The joint of wrist and ankle are articulated, and the stumps plunged into boiling fat to stop the haemorrhage ; the wound then heals over, and afterwards a piece of the stump of the bone that is destroyed by the contact with the



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boiling fat comes away. I saw hundreds of these poor people who had survived the operation.

"The neighbourhood of Adowa was full of their freshly dead bodies ; they had generally crawled to the banks of the streams to quench their burning thirst, where many of them lingered unattended and exposed to the elements until death put an end to their sufferings. At some places the bodies were close together, as if they had sought comfort in one another's society, and the missing members plainly told to whom the bodies belonged. In Captain De Martino's house, that used to be the Italian Residency, there must have been some thirty bodies of these wretched people : three at the well in the garden, where they died, evidently trying to procure water, and in the small summer-house there were seven, six belonging to natives, and one to an Italian, and what a horrible death the last of them must have suffered, surrounded by their dead companions."

On the day that the sentence of amputation of hand and foot was carried out, one of Menelik's cousins, Dedjatchmatch Besheer, who had been seriously wounded in the Battle of Adowa, died of his injuries. This was the signal for his soldiers to cut down in cold blood all the prisoners, including forty Italians, who were being taken to Shoa. Not only were they speared or shot in the most merciless manner and their bodies piled in a heap to rot in the sun, but their bodies were hideously mutilated too. They were castrated. This terrible outrage was perpetrated on all the Italian dead, and even on a number of the wounded.

As Wylde says :

"It is a custom that has existed for centuries, and they justify it by the Bible ; saying that David, the father of Solomon, proved his valour to King Saul in the same manner, and that their king is a descendant of King Solomon. A Southern Abyssinian or Yeppi maiden may still be won by such specimens of valour, but the custom now is not so much in vogue in Northern Abyssinia."

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No wonder the Italians had had enough of it, and after the court martial of General Baratieri (which came to no satisfactory conclusion, although it was clearly the fault of the Prime Minister, Signor Crispi, thousands of miles away, sending wild telegrams complaining that the campaign was no better than a "military phthisis," and urging the General to advance against an enemy whose strength and numbers was known to be four to one against him), the authorities decided upon more peaceful methods of developing their African possessions.

The attention of all Europe was awakened to the existence of Abyssinia after the news of Adowa. Hitherto all that was known of this mysterious land by the man in the street was that it was somewhere in Africa, and that Lord Napier had been out there to rescue some imprisoned Englishmen. But now the name of Menelik echoed in every Foreign Office in Europe, and missions were immediately sent out from England, France, Russia, and Spain.

The Great Powers tumbled over one another in their efforts to establish friendly intercourse with the Black Emperor. This undignified spectacle caused the Conquering Lion of Judah immense amusement and satisfaction. At the same time, however, he was quite prepared to show his good feeling, particularly towards the French, conferring the title of Duke of Entotto on Monsieur Lagarde, the French Minister. The fact that Djibuti, the French coaling station on the Red Sea, was being used for smuggling arms and ammunition into Abyssinia, as well as a port of embarkation for the slave traders, no doubt was in Menelik's mind at the time. And would not France have liked to establish an all-French zone across the whole of Africa from the Congo to the Red Sea?

Queen Victoria's envoy, Mr. Rennell Rodd,

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arrived at Addis Ababa with a treaty regarding the frontiers of British Somaliland and Abyssinia.

“Her Majesty Victoria, by the Grace of God, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, and His Majesty Menelik II, by the Grace of God King of Kings of Ethiopia, being desirous of strengthening and rendering more effective and profitable the ancient friendship which has existed between their respective kingdoms” . . . “Menelek II, Elect of God, King of Kings of Ethiopia, to Her Most Gracious Majesty Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland and Empress of India, upholder and keeper of the Christian religion. . . .”

The Treaty was signed on the 14th May, 1897, a year after the Italian defeat at Adowa. It was not the first treaty between Great Britain and Abyssinia. In 1884, King John, Menelik's predecessor, had agreed to prohibit and “perpetually abolish” the slave trade within his dominions, and the treaty was binding on his heirs and successors for ever. It is only fair to add that King John abided faithfully by every word of his promise, but his successor, Menelik II, still permitted the slave caravans to pass through his territory on their way to Hodeidah and Mecca.

But although Queen Victoria, the Good and the Powerful, was determined to put a stop to this barbarous traffic, there was another and increasingly important reason why England should be friendly with the Black Empire.

The Blue Nile springs to life at Lake Tana, in the mountains of North-Western Abyssinia. It is the life blood of Egypt and the Sudan. To have irritated Menelik at that moment might have meant the eventual damming up of Lake Tana and its outlet diverted towards the Red Sea. It would have been a gigantic undertaking, but experts have since declared it to be possible.

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Menelik, however, was not out to pick a quarrel with England. We were useful and valuable neighbours. It was different with Italy. Long before Adowa the Italians had made themselves unpopular with the Abyssinians. They were in too much of a hurry to get a foothold in the country. At Dogali, in 1887, they received their first defeat. This did not deter them. Two years later they made another advance and succeeded in establishing themselves on the upper plateau of Abyssinia proper. At the time it was said that Menelik had an undertaking with Italy, the latter agreeing to help him to the throne on the death of King John.

In 1894 Italy's real troubles began. She was getting greedy for more territory. She looked round enviously at England and France with their vast colonial possessions. She wanted the important province of Tigré, in addition to the land she had already been granted under Treaty with Menelik. The highlands of Abyssinia were rich and fertile and cool, and in many other ways eminently desirable, compared to the low, unhealthy coastal areas she already possessed.

At first the Italians met with success. So much so that by the end of 1895 practically the whole of the province of Tigré was in their hands.

So far so good. If Napier could do it, why not Italy? But the Italians had not counted on a united Abyssinia. The whole campaign had been conducted at comparatively small expense and with a miniature army. The first reverse came at Amba Alagi, on December 2nd, 1895. A week later the Italians were compelled to seek refuge within their fortifications at Makale. The siege lasted a month and the garrison was then compelled to give up from starvation and thirst. Quarter was given on condition that the Abyssinian natives who had fought for Italy should

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never again fight against their fatherland. At Adowa, a few months later, these poor wretches paid the penalty for breaking that promise.

After Adowa, public opinion at home was strongly opposed, not unnaturally, to further campaigns involving heavy loss of life. Still less was it prepared to spend vast sums of money on the upkeep of frontier garrisons, where the lines of demarkation, especially between Somalia and Abyssinia, were not too clearly indicated, and in fact had never been finally agreed upon between Italy and Menelik. Fortunately for Italy (our own boundary had been settled by Treaty in 1897), there were no serious incidents along these undecided boundaries to provoke further hostilities. Not until December 5th, 1934. And that was why, three months later, I set forth on this journey.

## CHAPTER II

### A ROMAN CALM

MY intention was to make as brief a stay in Rome as possible. That may sound a little sacrilegious, but time was valuable and I hoped there would be no delay in collecting my credentials before proceeding to Eritrea and Italian Somaliland. I was mistaken, however, in thinking that Italian Government Departments, even under Mussolini, work any more swiftly or less leisurely than our own. In fact, it was apparent, after I had been in Rome three days waiting at the end of the telephone, that I should have to find other distractions while awaiting the pleasure of His Excellency Count Ciano.

Now there are a good many things you can do in Rome up till two o'clock in the afternoon. After that hour, for some reason which I have never quite been able to fathom, all the museums close and Rome takes its siesta. And in Rome you have to do as the Romans do, or get arrested. It is imperative, therefore, if you intend to "do" Rome thoroughly, to set forth grimly at nine o'clock in the morning, guide-book in hand (carefully evading the dark and sinister-looking gentleman loitering in the foyer of your hotel) and in your best Italian (*see* "All you Want in Italy") to hail a taxi.

It is as well while you are travelling to your destination, St. Peter's, the Vatican or the Catacombs, to closely study the contents of this little book, particularly with reference to *Disputes*. You will note that "Your

meter appears to be out of order" translated into Italian is : "*Il suo tassametro sembra non funzioni bene*" ; which is pronounced eel *SOO*-o tahs-*SAH*-may-tro-*SEM*-brah non foonn-tse-O-ne *BAY*-nay, not forgetting that the syllable printed in thick type must be stressed. Beware, too, that if a double consonant occurs it must be pronounced twice, thus : *Essa* sounds like *Ess-sah*, not merely *Ess-ah*.

If you are not successful in disentangling the broken meter from the double consonants it is advisable to call a policeman at once. As nearly everybody in Rome, from the Holy Father downwards, wears a uniform, you may experience some difficulty in telling which is a policeman. (There is one sure way of settling the problem and that is to attempt to walk the wrong way down a one-way pavement.) When you have found your policeman you explain that you will not pay the amount on the meter : Non pah-gay-*RO KWESS*-to ahm-mon-*TAH*-ray. You will, of course, pay the full fare promptly and give the driver a good tip into the bargain because a crowd is gathering and an Englishman hates to be made to look a fool amongst foreigners.

Now let us return to the Guide Book. We are looking at St. Peter's.

"Compare those cabs, or the persons who are walking up the steps to the entrance, or who come down to the square. Small, very small things, are they not, near that pedestal which supports the statue? And what is the statue itself in the distance against the background of the façade? A mere point. . . . Let us go to the great colonnade ; let the reader try to put his arms round a column. Then let him look from below up to what is overhead. . . ."

(Up till two or three years ago it was not advisable

to indulge in this form of recreation in Roman streets and squares for fear of being hit on the head by odd missiles, from decaying vegetables to mysterious articles of washing, dropped from upper windows.)

But I am straying far from the theme of my story. I did not go to Rome to see St. Peter's again or to count the numbers of S.P.Q.R. initials which Mussolini has put up everywhere to remind the Romans of their former glory as well as to compete with the *munificentia* of medieval Popes whose names appear on every fountain, statue and church. I was here on business, and my business, besides collecting my East African credentials, was to try and find out what the Man in the Street was thinking about Abyssinia. It was not easy to get him to talk, apart from the fact that my Italian was only in the early Hugo stages, and not every Roman Man in the Street can speak French. The young men I talked to spoke with almost fanatical enthusiasm of their Duce. He was their Messiah. Their thoughts and aspirations are admirably summed up in the words of Article 5 of the Decalogue of the Second Division of Blackshirts :

"To believe, to obey, to fight : this is a thing soon said, but which in Fascist Italy is also soon done. One believes because one knows that the Duce is never wrong. One obeys because one knows that all orders come from him. One fights because one knows that fighting at his order means victory."

As to Abyssinia itself, I could tell them more than they knew themselves. If it was Mussolini's wish, they followed and asked no questions. But with all this inward enthusiasm there was no outward appearance of excitement or uneasiness which one might have expected to precede a great national undertaking. A Roman calm prevailed over all.



A few days after my arrival in Rome I received an invitation from King Alfonso of Spain to visit him at the Villa Tutto Ruffo. I shall always regret that my first meeting with the King took place at his temporary home in Rome instead of at the Palace in Madrid. True, it would have been a much more formal affair and I would have had to take my place amongst the priests and officers, the diplomatists and politicians waiting to pay their homage. But what was there here to compensate for the bewildering colours of Madrid, the dull blue brocades starred with silver, the crimson velvets, the heavy tassels of gold, the agate doorways, the marble lions coveted by Napoleon, the gold-encrusted armoury of Charles the Fifth and Philip the Second, the clocks of Ferdinand the Seventh . . . all those fantastic treasures which made such a fitting setting for Alfonso XIII, who himself looks as if he had stepped down from an ancestral canvas by Velasquez?

The Villa Tutto Ruffo is on the northern outskirts of Rome and stands on a hill commanding fine views of the pleasing landscapes that encircle the Eternal City. I arrived just before the King who had been to visit his second daughter, the Infanta Maria Christina, in a nursing home. The King's Private Secretary, one of the small bunch of intimate friends who followed Alfonso into exile, received me in a long room heavy with small paintings crammed tightly together on the walls. A minute later the King appeared.

A quick step at the end of the long room, a tall, lithe figure in a dark blue suit, a disarming smile, a warm handshake, a cigarette pressed almost into my mouth and I felt in the first few minutes that I was talking to someone I had known for years. Perhaps it was the photographs. I am always surprised when I find that people sometimes do look like their photo-

graphs. Yes, here was the strongly marked Hapsburg jaw and the even more famous drooping Bourbon lip. Yes, this was Alfonso XIII, whose birth was described by a Spanish newspaper in these words : "The hurricane has passed and a King has been born to us, the smallest quantity of a King conceivable." The same King who, a few minutes after his birth, was placed stark naked on a golden platter and shown to the Ministers and Members of the Diplomatic Corps.

There are three things which strike you about the King of Spain the first time you meet him. His youthful appearance, his perfect English, and his grasp of world affairs. Of these three qualities the least expected I suppose (if one forgets his photograph) is the first. Of all the kings to-day, whether they are ex- or otherwise, none have had such disturbing lives as Alfonso of Spain. And he perhaps least of all has deserved the misfortunes that have heaped upon him literally from the cradle. Throughout the forty-five years of his reign, and the four years of his exile (clouded for him by domestic unhappiness), he has contrived to keep astonishingly young in mind and body. But although he is essentially a figure of the twentieth century, there is still something of the grandee of 300 years ago about him. There is, of course, a vein of sadness about Alfonso, but not embittered sadness. What ex-king, after all, could help betraying an occasional shadow of regret when he reflects (as he must do a thousand times a day) upon the faded glories of yesterday?

"What do they say about Spain in England?" he asked. There was no suggestion of a foreign flavour about his English. I told him as much as I could, which, I am afraid, was not very illuminating. I mentioned that the rate of exchange was very much in our favour, that the holiday slogan in England nowadays was "See Spain first," and that I myself proposed, if I returned

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intact from Abyssinia, to spend a much-looked-forward-to holiday in his native land. I added that considerable satisfaction had been felt in England when a member of the House of Lords had visited Spain with the intention of inquiring into the private affairs of that country and had been promptly sent home by the next boat. Otherwise, I said, people were much more interested in the *King* of Spain than in the topsy-turvy politics of his native land.

It was difficult to keep pace with King Alfonso's machine-gun fire of questionings. Will there be a General Election soon? Would the National Government be returned again? What do they say about Ramsay MacDonald? Are the Belisha beacons a success? Was a big crowd expected for the Jubilee? Do they think that Germany is preparing for War? What do they say about Hitler? And Mussolini?

We smoked interminable cigarettes out of a large gold box bearing the royal cipher. They were Turkish, very Turkish cigarettes, and my answers were becoming a little husky. Accordingly, I produced my own case and the King smoked the last Virginian cigarette that I was able to secure till I reached Aden many weeks later. I realized, after we had been talking for twenty minutes, that here was a man very different to the *roi sportif* and "Europe's best-dressed monarch" of the illustrated weeklies (King Alfonso hardly plays any polo nowadays), a man of high intelligence, keenly interested in the affairs of the world, and a King, by no means sick at heart (mindful perhaps that Charles IV and Marie Louise, Ferdinand VII, Isabel and Alfonso XII, had shared similar fates), but ever watching for that strange swing of the pendulum which may one day take him back to his rightful heritage.

In conversation he has a way of leaning forward in his chair and swinging backwards and forwards and

touching your arm when he wishes to stress a particular point.

"Does Your Majesty expect to be recalled to Spain in the near future?" I inquired when an opening presented itself. The King smiled. It was a leading question and I had had to wait a long time to put it.

"Who can say?" Alfonso paused to light another cigarette. (By now I had smoked enough Turkish cigarettes to be practically incoherent.) "It may be two years, three years, even longer. They may decide in the end that a King is not so bad as the kind of governments they have had since I left Spain. The time will come, yes. But when—who can say?"

We left it at that and the conversation turned to Abyssinia. Alfonso leaned forward. "Are you old enough to remember my war with the Riffs?"

I nodded.

"Well, that ruinous war lasted for eight years. We calculated at the start it would last a year. It went on for year after year, costing the country staggering sums of money. But once we had put our hand to it we couldn't turn back. You know the rest of the story. Unless I am mistaken, Italy is going to experience the same as Spain. Mind you, fighting conditions in Morocco and Abyssinia are very different, but the Abyssinians live in a fortress which nature has made for them and where, I believe, they could defy the Italians for years."

I knew very little of Abyssinia as yet, and not as much as I should have done about Spain's war with Morocco, and I accordingly deferred to the King's judgment.

"I was in the Sudan last year," King Alfonso continued, "and I went quite near to the Abyssinian border. There is another menace for which Europe must keep her eyes open out there. Japan." The

King paused and loosened the buttons of his coat. "You see this shirt?" He invited me to feel its quality. The idea of fingering the shirt of His Most Catholic Majesty of Spain while it actually enshrouded the royal person, struck me at the time as being a little irreverent, but Alfonso, noticing my hesitation, quickly put me at my ease. "These shirts are made of Japanese silk and cost me 7s. 6d. each. The shirts I buy in London cost six times that amount. (I remembered suddenly that I hadn't paid my shirt bill before I left London and I reflected upon the wisdom of buying Japanese shirts in future.) Abyssinia is flooded, I am told, with Japanese goods. But the *real* menace of Japan will come when she asks Abyssinia for concessions so that she can grow her own cotton there. We will then have Japan at our back door. . . ."

We talked about many other things, of Alfonso's early motoring days with my Uncle Northcliffe, of my Uncle Rothermere (whom he described as one of the six greatest living Englishmen), of the *Daily Mail*, of his visit to the Vatican (when he *insisted* on kissing the Pope's toe), of cars, aeroplanes, racing and polo. We had been talking for over two hours and had smoked, I estimated, about fifty cigarettes between us. I rose to go and King Alfonso accompanied me to my taxi which had ticked up an enormous bill. It was one of the most interesting and stimulating talks I can remember, and I felt afterwards more convinced than ever that Spain is cutting off her own nose so long as she banishes this brilliant man and Spaniard from her borders.

When I returned to my hotel I found a message to say that Signor Grazzi of the Propaganda Department could see me that afternoon. I presented myself at the appointed hour and waited my turn in a vast ante-room where gilt and tapestry vied with large and

forbidding portraits of Mussolini and Vittore Emmanuel III. I was destined to see those portraits hanging in many remote corners of the globe during the next three months; and I regret now that I didn't keep count of the number of photographs of the Duce which glared at me, frowned at me, almost snarled at me, but very rarely *smiled* at me during my long journey.

Signor Grazzi, after the requisite number of forms had been filled up, stamped and endorsed, received me cordially and asked me about my journey. Once again I felt myself under the stern gaze of Il Duce and Vittore Emmanuel, but their presence, through familiarity, I suppose, was already becoming less disturbing. Grazzi informed me that he would arrange for me to see Count Ciano, the Minister for Propaganda, who would cast the final, official eye over me before sending me on my way. I was assured that it was a very unique privilege to be allowed to go at all, as the Duce had refused permission for any Special Correspondents to visit the East African Colonies, and this refusal applied to Italian newspapers as much as to French, English, German and American newspapers.

Anticipating further delays before my credentials would be completed I arranged to attend an audience at the Vatican the next day. My card was marked *Trono* and this admitted me, with a dozen others, to the private throne-room of the Pope.

I shall remember my visit to the Vatican because of one little incident. I had walked seeming miles along endless corridors, climbed interminable steps, traversed countless courtyards, had been challenged by a hundred splendid-looking fellows in dazzling uniforms designed by Michael Angelo, and eventually arrived a little hot and very bothered at the small private throne-room. It was nearly half an hour after the

time indicated on my card that a distant murmur heralded the approach of the Holy Father. We sank to our knees. All excepting an old lady on my right who remained standing. Pope Pius XI was in white; he looked rather frail and he made me think at that moment of one of his many titles: "The Servant of the Servants of Christ." He came to each of us in turn, spoke to some, blessed us and held out his ring (set with an enormous amethyst) for us to kiss. As he approached the lady on my right who was still standing, the chamberlain who walked at the Pope's side stepped up to her and rather anxiously motioned to her to kneel. The Pope, however, grasped at once what was wrong . . . she was an invalid and unable to kneel . . . and assured her immediately that she could receive the Apostolic Blessing without kneeling. It was only a small incident.

He then passed on to the corridors and ante-rooms and the large throne-room where hundreds of the Faithful, many of whom had trudged miles to receive the Holy Father's Blessing, were waiting on bended knees, carrying little boxes filled with medallions and crucifixes. It carried my mind back to another ceremony, at St. James's Palace, which I had attended barely a fortnight before, very similar in its setting but a vastly different company thronging its mirrored halls.

I had been in Rome nearly a week and there was still no word from Count Ciano. One resolution I had come to was that I would take Evans with me on my journey, not merely as a bodyguard, but (as I was assured was necessary in those remote regions), as a companion. For either capacity I could not have selected a better person.

Perhaps I had better digress at this stage to explain exactly who Evans is. It is Evans who "does" for me, and in the small wheels, as well as the large wheels of

my life, it is Evans this, Evans that and Evans everything else. He cooks for me, valets me, drives me (crazy sometimes), and in many ways successfully emulates the qualities of Jeeves himself. He is not, emphatically not, what is known as a "perfect treasure". He does, when the mood takes him, try out original if somewhat dangerous culinary experiments on my long-suffering digestion, or drives me the wrong way down one-way streets, or says I'm in when I'm out, and a thousand other annoying things. But these are by the way. The "perfect treasure", on the other hand (this I have on very good authority), invariably smokes your best cigars, drinks your Napoleon brandy, wears your suits and has a commission arrangement with the laundry, the grocer, the butcher, the baker and everybody else who calls at your back door.

The story of the discovery and development of Evans would fill a chapter, but that has little to do with the theme of this book. Let it suffice here to say that Evans was in the Navy before he came to me and he has never learned, therefore, those irritating little clichés one hears so often: "It came apart in me 'and, sir" (referring to the remains of a cup which you said belonged to Marie Antoinette), or, "I've only one pair of 'ands, sir" (when you ask him or her to do something which is not scheduled for that particular moment on the time-table).

At long last I received a summons from Count Ciano. The interview took three minutes. His Excellency assured me that everything would be done to make my visit interesting and profitable and that I would take with me a letter containing the Head of the Government's instructions to General Graziani to that effect. This letter was handed to me afterwards by the Minister for the Colonies. I thanked His Excellency and assured him, for my part, that I was deeply



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conscious of the unique privilege of being the only newspaper correspondent permitted to visit the Italian Colonies in East Africa.

Later on I shall have something to say about Count Ciano's propaganda methods. Our conversation in Rome was too brief to form any opinion of the man and his work. He has the advantage (or otherwise) of being the son-in-law of Mussolini, he is the youngest member of the Cabinet (he is thirty), he is good-looking, has charm of manner, and has been mentioned once or twice as the possible successor of Signor Grandi in London.

My plans were now complete, my passport had been signed by a Cabinet Minister, I had been blessed by the Pope, I had a letter from Mussolini, the King of Spain had given me his advice, Signor Grandi his best wishes, my luggage included a Cardinal's hat, a bunch of St. Christopher badges, a medicine chest filled with ominous little bottles, a revolver of extremely ancient pattern (bought for five shillings in Rome) . . . and so to Naples.

### CHAPTER III

#### NEAPOLITAN INTERLUDE

WHOEVER it was who said (I believe it was Nelson), "See Naples and die," perpetrated one of the greatest hoaxes in history. Or perhaps I am unlucky when I go there. Anyway, it was pouring with rain when we arrived and the deluge continued unabated until we left for Alexandria three days later on the *Tevere*. Most people when they arrive at Naples for the first time, are seized with an insatiable desire to rush to the top of Vesuvius. There must be a pathological explanation for this. These same people are afflicted with similar strange inhibitions when they see the Dome of St. Peter's or the Eiffel Tower or the campanile of Westminster Cathedral. It is not that they want to see the view. The best bird's-eye views, after all, are obtained from an aeroplane. Perhaps it is an obscure form of inferiority complex. One could understand the thing more readily if it entailed some effort or a little daring on the part of the adventurer. You can sit in a comfortable chair in the funicular railway and be carried to the top of Vesuvius, just as you can step in a lift in St. Peter's and for a few lire be whisked nearly to the top of the dome.

I have never been to the top of Vesuvius and I don't propose to go there. I am prepared to take volcanoes for granted. They only cease to be uninteresting to me when they become extinct. I remember the first time I saw Fuji, in Japan, a dramatic experience which no traveller forgets. I turned, with a note very near to rapture in my voice, to an American woman who

sat next to me in the dining-car of the Kobe-Tokyo Express. "I guess I'll climb to the top of that cute mountain," was her only comment. There was a note of triumph in her voice, too. Possibly she was aware that pilgrims (as well as large American ladies) can, for a fee, be carried on the backs of sturdy natives to the very top of the Sacred Mountain.

Volcanoes, I realize, have very little to do with the theme of this book. But here I was stranded in the rain at Naples for three days and what does one do there if one does not rush to the top of Vesuvius? There is Pompeii and Herculaneum, and the Blue Grotto at Capri, and the blood of St. Januarius in the Cathedral. I had already "done" most of these things fairly thoroughly. The only thing left was to stand on the quays and cheer the departing troops on their way to East Africa, a thought which somehow did not fire me with the right kind of enthusiasm. I felt a little sorry for them in their new boots and heavy rainproof tunics. They looked uncomfortable and a little awkward.

It was a pouring wet day and even the most boisterous Latin spirits were a little dampened by the elements. A large transatlantic liner had been hurriedly converted into a troop-carrier, and the air was filled with the noise of cranes loading aeroplanes, lorries and armaments into the hungry holds. The men were wearing their new colonial uniforms and tropical helmets. On their backs they carried heavy knapsacks, with small tin cans, and over their shoulders rifles with fixed bayonets. The actual embarkation was being carried through with perfect smoothness, but as soon as the troops had mounted the gangways they began to swarm all over the ship like ants. They sat on the rails, on lifeboats, ventilation cowl, and some even climbed into the rigging.

A military band was playing patriotic airs on the

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quayside, but presently this was drowned by the soldiers on board singing Fascist songs, which were taken up by the mothers and fathers and brothers and sweet-hearts on the quay. I nearly said the wives, too, but most of the soldiers were mere boys. As the time approached for the vessel to sail on its long voyage the crowd on shore seemed to catch some of the enthusiasm of the young men. Oranges and lemons were thrown towards the ship, many of them falling short into the water. Helmets were thrown into the air and the crowd roared with laughter when one of these, too, fell into the water. The girls tried to throw bunches of flowers, and when these were caught by their sweet-hearts they made garlands of them.

It was a strange study to watch the faces of those who were starting out on this grim adventure, and those who were being left behind. Many of these young men had been brought up from the cradle with the word "war" dinning in their ears. Now they were going out to discover for themselves what that word meant. The fathers and mothers already knew. No wonder they looked sad.

At last the great ship weighs anchor. A stir of emotion goes through the crowd on shore, and the men on board make a final, frenzied display of enthusiasm. They wave flags and handkerchiefs, and shout and sing. "Du-ce, Du-ce, Du-ce !" they cry. "We'll bring you back the beard of the Negus !" one shouts. And another, "A chi l'Abissinia ?" And the crowd as one man makes reply, "A noi !" The band begins to play a Fascist anthem. Movie-cameras work furiously. The ropes holding the ship to the quayside have fallen into the water, and the donkey-engines are drawing them on board. The last link with the Fatherland has been severed. The ship is moving slowly into the Bay, while Vesuvius frowns angrily down on this

strange scene. Many tearful eyes watch the disappearing ship, and one thought alone is passing through a thousand minds : "How many will return ?"

The problem of how to successfully kill a wet evening in Naples was solved the following day by the appearance of the Rat. He was one of those obvious characters who might have strayed from within the yellow covers of a sixpenny thriller. He reminded me of the famous Clutching Hand. We first became aware of his presence in a small arcade near the hotel where we were engaged in the quite innocent pursuit of buying postcards. He did not approach us at first, but crouched very near, outwardly interested in everything but us. We concluded that he was either the usual kind of pimp hanging about for English and American clients, or an anarchist. As we moved on, he moved, too. He was always there. Finally, while we were waiting to cross a street, he came up and spoke. With the aid of my pocket Italian-English dictionary I succeeded in establishing some kind of understanding. It appeared that it would be worth our while to meet his brother, who could speak excellent English, and who would wait for us on the corner at nine that evening. There seemed no harm in the suggestion, even if one had no intention of keeping the appointment. The opera was sold out, so why not see the Rat and his brother ? An experiment in living dangerously in Fascist Naples suggested many possibilities.

The Rat was waiting at the agreed time and meeting place. He left us for a moment to fetch his brother, who most obviously was not his brother, and rejoiced in the name of Jack and looked as if he had not had a meal for several days.

We went to a café and drank cheap chianti. The Rat disappeared. Conversation was easy, as Jack spoke good English. He was surprised, I think, when we

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repeatedly assured him that we were not clients that night for his particular line of business. To-night we merely wanted to spend a few hours in the cafés and to try and find out what the Man in the Street thought about the Abyssinian adventure.

Mussolini's big broom, Jack told us, had cleaned up most of the vice, but little of the squalor of Naples. It isn't necessary to descend into the murky Neapolitan cafés to realize this. The mule-carts are still here. So are the beggars, in their thousands. With the exception of the main thoroughfares the streets are indescribably dirty. The "feelthy postcard" sellers pursue the foreigner with the same old vigour. People go to sleep on the pavement in the middle of the day. Naples, least of all Italian towns, has felt the effects of the new regime . . . unless it is the entire absence of English visitors. One even sees anti-War posters in the cafés and the streets.

We moved from café to café, each slightly more squalid than the last. Nobody took any particular notice of us, except to beg for a cigarette. Wild games of cards were in progress, which usually ended in blows. Nobody seemed to care much about Abyssinia. One thing puzzled me particularly. At each café we visited the Rat was there ahead of us. Sometimes we would leave a café before him and dive into narrow smelly alleyways where the upper balconies of houses almost touched. We descended into subterranean bars where at first it was too dark to distinguish any forms or objects. Then as one's eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, one could pick out down-and-outs in various stages of slumber and intoxication. But there sure enough, peering round a corner or peeping through a crevice, would be the Rat. It was uncanny. It was clear that he was determined not to let us, or Jack, out of his sight.

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Eventually we repaired to a house, or rather a tenement building, and climbed innumerable floors in pitch darkness to a room in which we found a family gathering consisting of an old woman, her son, his wife, his sister, and two children. These, Jack informed us, were his relations. There was one large iron bed in which the family slept, a few pieces of broken furniture, a table, and a tawdry picture of the Sacred Heart before which two dirty candles burnt. There was no picture of Mussolini. A door opened out to a kind of balcony which accommodated the cooking and sanitary arrangements, as well as a few emaciated chickens. I was about to inspect this part of the establishment when a man walked into the room from the balcony. It was the Rat. These dramatic entrances and exits of his no longer occasioned us any surprise. We had resolved much earlier in the evening that he possessed saturnine powers. But now I had seen and heard enough. Nothing can equal the squalor of a Naples slum. It was immeasurably worse than Glasgow. I decided that the quicker we got out of that building and back to the hotel, and a bath, the better.

As an experiment in living dangerously, the evening was a dismal failure. As an endeavour to find out what the Italian Man in the Street was thinking about Abyssinia it was equally unsuccessful. But it at least afforded us a glimpse of the other side of the Fascist picture.

The next afternoon we sailed on the *Tevere* for Alexandria. I was beginning to grow impatient to get farther south. It was nearly a fortnight since we left England. The war clouds over Abyssinia loomed blackly enough when we left Dover, and hostilities might begin at any moment. There were rumours of fresh incidents on the frontier. The Mediterranean journey occupied four days, including a brief stop at

Syracuse, where everybody rushed ashore with their Kodaks and bought postcards of the cathedral.

Life on board, when one is accompanied by Evans, becomes a very serious nautical affair. It revolves around a vocabulary which, until recently, was quite new to me. One does not talk about stairs. They are ladders. You lean over guard rails, not the ship's side. You are careful not to trip over the port and starboard bollards. You discover that every ship has a stem. You learn about the telemotorgear, which, incidentally, was invented by a sailor. Here is the fo'c'sle, which is never spelt or pronounced forecastle by people who know. There is the forepoop, and the galley, and so on. It becomes a fascinating game.

Three days on the *Tevere* (which has since been converted into a troopship) otherwise were very dull indeed. Most of the passengers were on a cruise to Egypt, Palestine, Turkey and Greece. They were going to see a great number of places in an incredibly short time. Baedekers were being hungrily devoured while the air was filled with the busy, scratching chorus of knitting needles.

I sought refuge in the second volume of Lord Birkenhead's life of his father. And I remembered a story of F. E. which I think it will not be remiss to repeat here. My Uncle Rothermere, who was living at the Ritz at the time, was entertaining Lord Birkenhead, Mr. Bonar Law and Lord Beaverbrook to dinner, which was followed by bridge. The party was in every way a great success. Good cigars, excellent brandy, brilliant conversation.

When the time came to go home Lord Birkenhead wandered by mistake into Lord Rothermere's bedroom. There he espied a dressing-gown of Oriental splendour which he greatly coveted. Lord Rothermere promptly and characteristically presented it to him and



accompanied F. E. to his taxi. Passers-by in Piccadilly had the unusual experience of seeing a Lord Chancellor going home with a dressing-gown over his arm.

When F. E. arrived at Grosvenor Place he found he had no money to pay the taxi. Accordingly a few minutes later an astounded taxi driver drove off with a dressing-gown fit for a sultan, in lieu of the fare, presented to him by the Lord Chancellor. I have often wondered what happened to that dressing-gown.

Our stay at Alexandria was without incident, but very nearly prolonged by my failing to declare the revolver I had acquired in Rome. Just as things were beginning to look a little difficult an English customs official who had worked in one of our family businesses came to my rescue and calm was restored.

I had always heard that Alexandria was the wickedest city in the world, but I found the notorious Cleopatra Street as respectable as Regent Street on a Sunday afternoon. We hired an ancient cab and went down to the Arab quarter. An air of calm and languid respectability prevailed in the streets and the cafés. We sat outside a café and drank very strong coffee.

A young Arab sailor of immensely powerful physique came over to our table and asked if we would like a guide. I told him that we were leaving the next day for Suez and there would not be time to utilize his services. He spoke good English. He informed us that he was known as Abdul the Magnificent, and that he was the strongest man in Alexandria. I was not going to dispute that point, but to leave us in no doubt he pulled off his shirt there and then to display a chest and biceps which reminded me of those advertisements of strong men with lightning coming out of their stomachs. He told us that he was wrestling for his living but he found difficulty in securing opponents. That, I told him, was quite understandable. He

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invited me to sample a little hashish and proceeded to roll a cigarette in which he placed a few small crumbs. He warned me that it would have rather peculiar effects and showed me how the cigarette should be smoked to achieve the best results. But the only effect it had upon me was to make me drop off to sleep.

Alexandria was our last contact with civilization for several months, by which I mean regular baths, digestible food and clean beds. The journey to Suez, with two changes and long waits in hot smelly station buffets, is one to be avoided at all costs. It can be done in complete comfort and at far less cost by taking the train to Cairo and motoring from there to Suez. Unfortunately, I discovered this too late. At Suez we very nearly started a minor civil war by giving our suitcases to the wrong porters. The rival hotels decided to fight for our patronage. Finally we had to summon police aid, but not before damage had been done to one of my cases. The next morning the nightmare began.

## CHAPTER IV

### RED SEA NIGHTMARE

OUR instructions were to be on the wharf at eight o'clock sharp, where we would be met by the Company's tender and taken out to the *Cagliari* which was lying down stream. This early start entailed no particular discomfiture for the simple reason that all thought of sleep after 5.30 was out of the question. Suez wakes up at that hour and when Suez wakes up it likes the whole world to know about it. A helpful dragoman, who looked as if he had wandered out of the pages of the Old Testament, accompanied me on a tour of the shops in the town at 6.30 a.m. in the hope of finding someone who could cash a Cook's cheque. Eventually we had to give it up as there was some doubt whether the whole of Suez could muster as much as £20 at that hour of the morning.

We raced out to the wharf and then settled down to a wait of two and a half hours in the sweltering heat before a very dilapidated-looking tender, about to sink (so it seemed) with all hands at any moment, drew, or rather snorted, alongside. Were we at last on our way? Not a bit of it! There was another forty-five minutes to wait.

I occupied this time very profitably in the company of an English lawyer practising at Cairo, but who was not accompanying us down the Red Sea. He explained the legal position of the Suez Canal to me. Great Britain owns (thanks to Disraeli), 176,602 out of the 400,000 shares in the Suez Canal Company.

This merely gave England a commercial interest, but the control still rested in the hands of the King of Egypt. It was not until 1888 that an international agreement, after lengthy and complicated deliberation, was signed by nine powers.

Three main problems were settled by this Convention—the control of the Canal, the protection of the Canal, and freedom of passage. Regarding the latter and obviously the most important point in the agreement, it decreed that “the Suez Maritime Canal shall always be free and open in time of war, without distinction of flag. Consequently the high contracting parties agree not in any way to interfere with the free use of the Canal in time of war, as in time of peace. The Canal shall never be subjected to the exercise of the right of blockade.”

The Convention did not give Great Britain any special rights in the control of the Canal, but when Egypt was given her independence in 1922 there were four reservations and one of these was that Great Britain should share with Egypt the responsibility for protecting the Canal and of ensuring freedom of transit for vessels of all nations. It is quite clear, therefore, that both Great Britain and the League of Nations are powerless to close the Canal to Italian Military transport in the event of Italy leaving the League or refusing to come to a peaceful solution of her disputes with Abyssinia by arbitration.

The *Cagliari* was a small oil-burner of about 2,000 tons. She was built at Glasgow in 1907, which, I believe, is quite old as ships go. She was indescribably dirty and the cabins were equivalent in comfort and size to those of the third class on an English ship. The crew were mostly Somalis, Arabs and Abyssinians, with thin, spindly legs and a hopeless look about the eyes. At odd hours of the day and night one came

across them crouching on their knees on deck with their gaze directed towards Mecca.

The food was appalling. At eight o'clock we were served with tepid coffee (or tea), far worse than anything you get at a station buffet in England, with goats' milk, biscuits, butter and plum jam. Luncheon, heralded by innumerable bells, bugles and banging on drums, took place at the exasperating hour of ten minutes past eleven. Nobody had the slightest idea why it should be *ten* past eleven, and not, say, a quarter, or perhaps half past. There it was, you had to take it or leave it. As it more often than not consisted of roast camel, we did quite frequently leave it. Dinner was at seven, and except for occasional minestrone soup, consisted of the same delicacies as lunch.

On the *Cagliari* there was one bathroom for *signori* and one for *signora*. But as there were no women aboard (the only female creatures being a few emaciated hens and a scraggy ginger cat about whose sex there appeared to be some doubt), there were actually two baths at our disposal. Seeing that there were only six passengers on board this sounds almost luxurious. At least, I thought so myself until, in a rash moment, I tried the taps (having previously expelled two enormous black creatures from the bottom of the bath) and found the taps didn't work ! Finally, after frantic gesticulations and dire threats hurled in the face of an astonished Sudanese boy who didn't understand a word of Italian or French, a few tepid drops of rusty-looking water trickled out of the spray. The bathroom was directly over the boiler room, and as we were spending five days zigzagging down the Red Sea, I decided that it would be cooler, and on the whole more sanitary, to dispense with baths until we arrived at Massowah.

Our companions on this grim voyage included a young Italian shipping clerk, an Italian engineer

## RED SEA NIGHTMARE

who had spent thirty years up and down the Red Sea, and was about to take up a new post for an indefinite period at Jeddah, and another Italian who was something of a mystery, but who proved later to be only one of the many fortune-hunters attracted by the get-rich-quick possibilities of an Italo-Abyssinian war.

I won't dwell on the discomforts and discouragements of that five days' journey down the Red Sea any longer than necessary. I shall have enough to say about the heat and flies and mosquitoes later.

On the third day we arrived at Jeddah, the port for Mecca, through which tens of thousands of pilgrims pass every year on their way to the Holy City. In the late afternoon the yellow, sun-baked skyline looked slightly sinister as it appeared above the horizon. The *fata Morgana* gave it the appearance of a town floating in the sky. This was accentuated by the gaunt skeleton of a burnt-out wreck of a small French trading vessel which lay on its side across the entrance to Jeddah. We were told that it is quite customary in these parts to insure a vessel worth £1,500 for anything up to £3,000, and then run it aground or set it afire.

Jeddah looked an exciting place, and, much to our disappointment, the captain announced that owing to lost time we would not be able to go ashore. Our disappointment, happily, was short-lived. Another and much more exciting event was about to take place. We could feel it in the air. Sailors and deck-hands were rushing wildly about, as if the Prophet himself was about to make a miraculous appearance. The Captain, the First Officer and the Chief Engineer all appeared in resplendent white drill suits at the top of the gangway. A small piece of faded red carpet had been placed from the top of the gangway to the entrance to the saloon. Presently an even more shabby launch than the one at Suez pulled alongside. There were half a dozen

people aboard. The men were wearing Arab dress. A swarthy face, half hidden by enormous dark glasses, looked up and I seemed vaguely to recognize it. Was it the Aga Khan? No, the façade was not sufficiently imposing for the descendant of Mohammed. A murmur went along the deck. "Le Re" and "Sa Majesté," I caught. Then I remembered. It was Amanullah, ex-King of Afghanistan. A moment later a heavily veiled lady, whom we were informed was the Queen Mother, preceded the ex-King up the gangway. When she reached the top she waved aside the servile bows and obeisances of the Captain, the First Officer, and the Chief Engineer, and disappeared into the saloon.

Amanullah, however, behaved like a real ex-King. He might have been stepping on the platform at Victoria to be received by the entire Royal Family of England instead of climbing aboard a very small tramp-steamer in the Red Sea. The royal, or I should say ex-royal, smile embraced the entire company on deck. It was friendly, but not too friendly. Majesty for a moment came into its own. Everyone was obviously delighted, a fact that amused me, for I always understood that only the English had the royalty complex.

The ex-King had been on a visit to Mecca which accounted, undoubtedly, for the unpretentious nature of the royal baggage. This consisted of barely half a dozen suit-cases, singularly devoid of the usual royal crowns and insignia, carried aboard by seedy-looking camp followers, who had accompanied the royal party from the Holy City. The bags were speedily unpacked and then left on deck for the purpose of airing. Amanullah, after all, has Western ideas about cleanliness, and a week or two at Mecca is apt to be a little dusty.

The presence of ex-royalty aboard the *Cagliari* had an electrical effect upon the *cuisine*. The most welcome



King Amanullah of Afghanistan with the Author





Hairdressing in the Market Place at Asmara

indication was at dinner. The goats, as was proper, were separated from the sheep. The royal party were set at another table, with fresh flowers in the centre, while the three remaining passengers, including Evans and myself, were set at another. The royal menu was written in French on a card bearing the Company's monogram in gold, while *Sole Frite* appeared on our plain menu card as mere *Fritto di Soglioli*. The royal napkins, too, were folded to look slightly papal while ours were slipped through tin rings bearing our numbers. As a final note of exclusiveness, a bottle of Worcester sauce (prepared from the recipe of a nobleman in the county) was placed on the royal table.

Apart from the menus, the napkins and the Worcester sauce, the dinner itself was by far the best we had in the Red Sea, and for once did not include camel, macaroni or spaghetti. Many anxious moments had evidently been spent by the cooks and galley boys in their efforts to prepare a dish worthy to set before an ex-king. But alas, majesty, even ex-majesty, is only flesh and blood like the rest of us, and *mal de mer* is no respecter of persons. *Amanullah did not appear*. The Queen Mother did not appear. Queen Souriya's cousin and the aide-de-camp took one bite of *Sole Frite*, and vanished. The two stewards (particularly the one who looked like the ex-King of Siam) wilted visibly and almost wept.

The next morning dawned a little more auspiciously. There was music in the air when I awoke from a light, restless sleep, somewhere about 6.30. It reminded me painfully of first attempts at *Bluebells of Scotland*. Further sleep was out of the question. I hurried upstairs in my pyjamas to remonstrate with the offender. It was Amanullah. He had discarded the silks and shrouds of yesterday and sat there in his shirt-sleeves, braces,

belt and beret, and from his industrious attitude looked more like a piano-tuner than an ex-king. He smiled.

Amanullah's is a sad smile. The smile of a man with an ache in his heart. The eyes have lost their old sparkle and alertness, the hair is thinning, the frame, once powerful and broad, shows signs of strain. Amanullah is only 43, but he looks old and tired. He is the most unhappy of the ex-kings. What does he see when he looks around? King Alfonso welcomed in every capital in Europe, the Kaiser still keeping mock court at Doorn, Ferdinand of Bulgaria with his birds and butterflies, Prajadhipok of Siam, his cars and his mechanical gadgets; perhaps King George of Greece will have returned to Athens before these words appear in print, and Mr. Pu Yi has already become an Emperor for the third time. But what about Amanullah, the king who gave tips of £20 to astonished waiters and page boys, who presented a £100 note to an out-of-work he saw in Sheffield, who arrived in London with 120 trunks, and cost the British Government £5,000 a week to entertain, and who mistook tradesmen's samples sent to his London hotel as gifts and took them back to Kabul without paying, the King who was said to have fled from his country with jewels valued at £500,000 and £30,000 in sovereigns?

To-day he lives a lonely existence in a small villa in the suburbs of Rome. The jewels have gone, the glamour has gone too, although he is still addressed as "Your Majesty." Sometimes Mussolini remembers that he has two ex-kings living near him (and perhaps reflects on the probable fate of ex-dictators), and invites him to his box at military displays and football matches. Otherwise poor Amanullah lives forgotten. He has tried many ways of retrieving his lost fortunes. He has been an estate agent, a farmer and an antique dealer. He likes Rome because of its climate, but Europe, in

## RED SEA NIGHTMARE

spite of his Western views, is not his spiritual home. His eyes are ever directed towards Kabul, and there, bitter irony, he sees to-day the realization of his dreams under the kingship of another, his former Commander-in-Chief. And Amanullah means "Peace of God," that one thing beyond all others that has been denied him in a spectacular life, a life which, had things been different, should now be in its prime.

Amanullah speaks French, Russian and Italian, and reads, but doesn't speak, English. He asked me about my trip. I was particularly keen to hear what he thought about Abyssinia. Would he perhaps see a parallel to his own case in Haile Selassie, another Eastern monarch who had returned from a European tour with Western ideas to superimpose on an ancient civilization not yet ripe for such drastic reforms? Would the Lion of Judah pay the penalty, like Amanullah, of being several hundred years ahead of his times?

Amanullah spoke with admiration of Haile Selassie. There must exist, after all, a certain feeling of *camaraderie* between crowned and uncrowned heads. He spoke of his sincerity and of the wisdom of not trying to do too much in a hurry. His difficulty, he thought, would not be the rebel Rases, but the church, as powerful in Abyssinia to-day as it was in England in the days of Henry II. Obviously Amanullah had to speak with discretion when he mentioned Italy. He thought Mussolini had definitely set his mind on conquering Abyssinia, but from his own knowledge of that type of mountainous country, he calculated that it would take three years to completely subjugate the Empire of Haile Selassie. And by that time a financial crisis at home might reduce the whole campaign to a stalemate.

I could not resist asking the one question which is uppermost in one's mind when one meets an ex-King. "Does Your Majesty expect to return to your country

soon?" Back came the reply in a flash . . . this was the old Amanullah speaking . . . "*Of course* I shall go back. I have a tremendous following there which is growing stronger every day. They are gradually realizing that all the reforms which their present king is carrying out are the very ones that I myself initiated. It may be a year or two yet—but *of course* I shall go back."

With that, I decided that this informal audience had better conclude, and I went down to see if the shower could be induced to work. Inspired, like the cook, by the presence of royalty on board, it behaved magnificently and for the first time in the Red Sea I succeeded in feeling cool for quite two minutes.

During the day it became apparent that there was trouble in the royal camp. Amanullah looked agitated, the Queen Mother (a remarkably handsome lady) looked agitated, so did the King's aide-de-camp and Queen Souriya's cousin. Finally an appeal was made to me. "Excuse please yes"—this was the Queen's cousin—"His Majesty the King—yes—go to Massowah, yes, Foreign Office at Cairo, yes, send visa transit yes—His Majesty go Italy—yes—stay Massowah—go boat home—send visa *vivement* yes, please, excuse yes." The difficulty was soon overcome, and, having dispatched the necessary telegram, I was rewarded for the remainder of the trip by smiles from each member of the royal party, as we met on deck, in the saloon, or in the *signori*. It interested me to know, anyway, that even ex-kings are not allowed diplomatic immunity from visas and the like.

The day ended on as unusual a note as it began. I had gone down for a final shower (which was now functioning fairly rationally), and was emerging, when the bathroom doorhandle flew off and rolled under the open door of the *signori* adjoining. I went in to recover it and bumped into Amanullah in dressing-gown trying

to repair a broken chain. The ex-King smiled. I smiled. And we then assisted each other in a little amateur plumbing. Our efforts were successful. We laughed and tumbled off to bed. I began to like him enormously.

The next morning we arrived at Massowah. A heat mist almost obscured the flat, treeless coastline, and the oily smoothness of the water was a warning of the Turkish bath temperature that awaited us. Amanullah was early astir and busy at the piano, and after breakfast we went up to the boat deck and managed to carry on a fairly intelligent conversation in French, while he took occasional shots at seagulls which wheeled round the *Cagliari*. This was at least a change from reading, dreaming and brooding in Rome. The life of an ex-King is a pathetic one.

## CHAPTER V

### THE VENICE OF THE SOUTH

THE less said about Massowah the better. It was one of those dark patches in a Special Correspondent's experiences that are best forgotten. "The Venice of the South" they call it.

Italy has owned Massowah since 1885, and, seeing that it is her oldest colonial possession (with the exception of part of Assab Bay which she bought from Egypt as a coaling station in 1870), sentimental reasons may perhaps justify her thinking of Massowah in this picturesque light. It had been occupied by the Egyptians, and when they were in difficulties with the Mahdists Italy saw her chance and seized the port. During the next few years Italy succeeded in extending her territory till she possessed some 650 miles of Red Sea coast line.

King John of Abyssinia watched the encroachment of the Italians with apprehension. He saw in it the narrow end of the wedge. He attacked and inflicted a serious defeat on them at Dogali in January, 1887. The Italians, undismayed by this setback, pushed farther into the interior, as far as Asmara and Keren.

By 1892 the colony of Eritrea extended to 52,000 square miles. To-day it exceeds 64,000 square miles. Perhaps by the time these words appear in print that area may have been greatly extended and the far plateaux and lonely peaks of Tigré stained red with the blood of thousands of brave Abyssinians.

We dropped anchor at ten, every berth and all

## THE VENICE OF THE SOUTH

available space along the jetties being occupied by troopships and commandeered liners bringing war materials and road-builders to the Colony. The police came aboard. There were the usual silly questions before landing. Father's surname? The fact that it happened to be the same as my own seemed to cause mild surprise. Mother's maiden name? Why have you come and how soon will you be going? Eventually we got ashore. There was not a bed in the place. We spent the whole day looking for one. People were sleeping on packing cases along the quays. We would have to do the same. No, there was no bed even for King Amanullah.

In despair we sat down on the balcony of the Hotel Savoia which overlooks the harbour and tried to formulate plans. The twice weekly train to Asmara, three hours away and 8,000 feet up, had left that morning. We had already tried every form of bribery and corruption to get a bed. I had even posed to the local agent of the Shell Co. as one of their chief shareholders, but he informed me that even if Sir Henri Deterding himself appeared he would have to sleep on the quay.

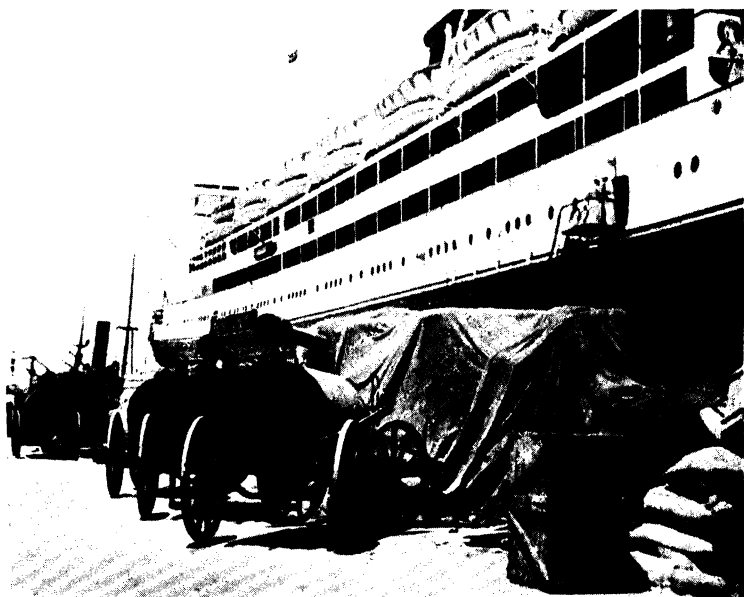
The position was becoming acutely serious. We watched the strange throng as they moved along below. The very new-looking Italian soldiers in their awkward-fitting rainproof tunics and breeches and yellow boots; the slender stature and graceful bearing of the native troops, Eritrean, Somali, some Abyssinians, and crosses of all three, in bright blue uniforms with splashes of red and tall fezes; some had little silver crosses dangling round their necks and they embraced warmly when meeting in the street; gangs of natives singing cheerfully as they unloaded lorries, steam-rollers, and road-making apparatus from tugs, while others, directed by Italian mechanics, speedily erected the lorries on the quayside; Italian sailors in their white No. 6 suits,



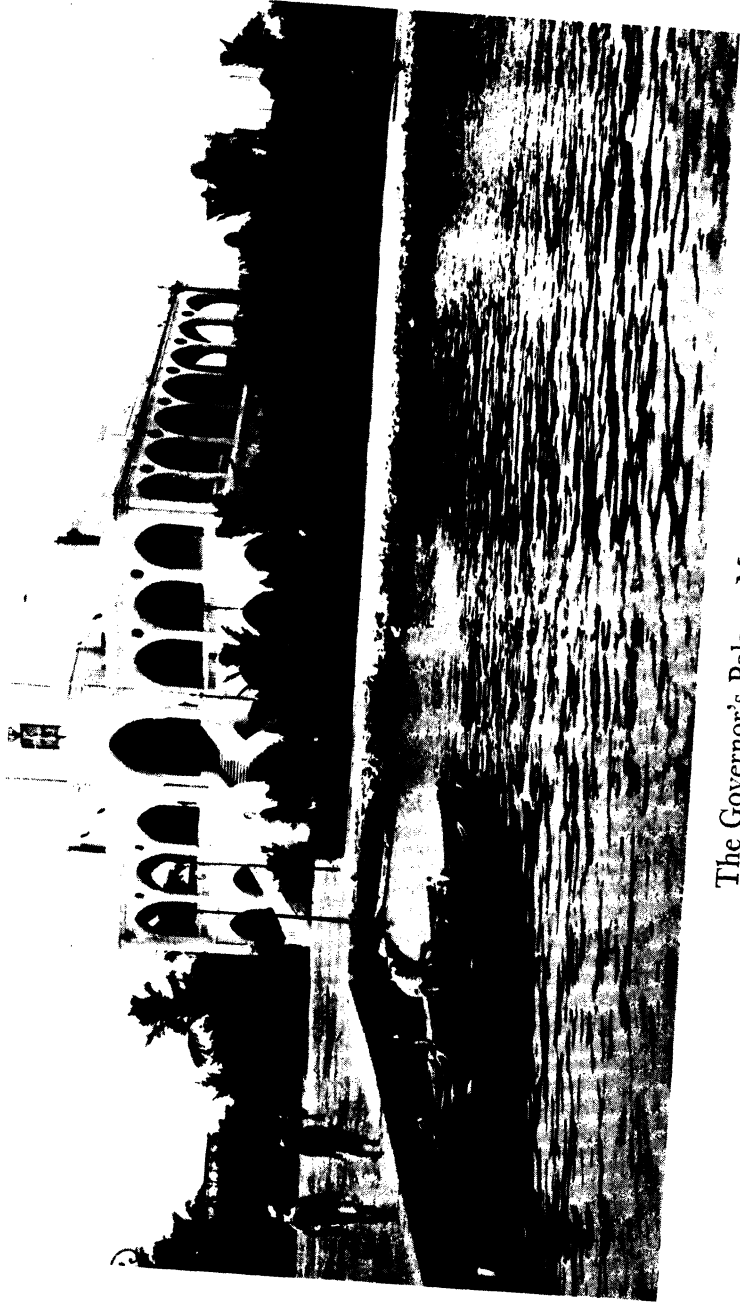
short and thick set and with none of the smartness of the British sailor ; cavalcades of camels, heavily laden and walking with the grave dignity of churchwardens ; mules and donkeys ; half-caste children, tall, aristocratic Abyssinians in their picturesque capes and light grey sombreros ; native women with astonishing permanent waves ; piccaninnies diving for coins ; porters arguing about tips ; "new chums" just arrived from Italy en route for Mogadiscio, seven days farther south, rashly exposing their heads and arms and legs to the scorching rays of the tropical sun ; dispatch riders on motor-bicycles ; lorries stirring up a blinding dust ; hooters screaming (all Italians like the sound of their own hooters) ; everybody saluting everybody else.

Massowah had gone mad. Mussolini, with one stroke of the pen, had raised it from the position of a sleepy little port the size of Deal, to a powder magazine on which were focused the eyes of the whole world. I counted twenty ships in the harbour, ranging from 20,000-ton transatlantic liners to small tramp steamers half the size of the *Cagliari*. I counted another twelve ships waiting to come inside the harbour. Amongst the latter was a German steamer, which, according to rumour, had attempted to land 6,000 tons of cargo labelled "Provisions" and destined for Abyssinia and which was found to contain arms and ammunitions. Several ships had waited as long as a month at the entrance to the harbour and had then been forced, through shortage of water and provisions, to return to Aden without disembarking their cargo.

The water shortage at Massowah was so serious at one time that supplies had to be sent over from Aden. The condensing plant, which yields 80 tons of water per day, was hopelessly inadequate to deal with the demands of this vast concentration camp. The daily ration when I was at Massowah was only two quarts



Sinews of War at Massowah



The Governor's Palace, Massowah

## THE VENICE OF THE SOUTH

per day, and even this was an improvement on conditions a month or two earlier.

The shortage was not confined to water and beds. There was no butter to be had at all. I had to go to half a dozen shops before I could get a box of matches. But all this was excellent training for the privations that were yet to come.

Even the streets and the little *piazza* were littered with the sinews of war, great and small. Aeroplane wings, barbed wire, cordite cases, casks of chianti. Nobody seemed to be supervising things, yet there was a fair degree of order about it all. Although the shops closed from one till three, because of the heat, the unloading and dispatching continued at fever pitch while the sun scorched down like a curse upon all mankind. Nobody seemed to notice the heat, excepting an Italian soldier who died within four minutes on the jetty in front of the hotel. We drank copious quantities of very light Dutch lager which made us hotter still.

Meantime we had sent envoys to try and discover if there were any means of our getting up to Asmara. Our scout returned to say that he had found and chartered a car and that we were to start for the capital at four in the morning. It seemed a desperate hour to start a journey, but we would have gladly walked to escape this insufferable heat. We were told that important road works were in progress and that all transport had to be done by night. There was no more to be said. But where were we to lay our drooping heads until 4 a.m.? The cafés closed at 9 p.m. The quays looked decidedly hard and uncomfortable. A bed of barbed wire with a cordite case as pillow was the only alternative. And then the Captain appeared. Yes, *of course* we could go back to sleep on the ship, and he would arrange dinner at 7.30, and there would be a

launch to take us ashore at 3.45 a.m. We heaved pönderous sighs of relief.

That night was the most stifling, breathless, sleepless, airless one of the whole journey. In desperation I carried my mattress on deck and lay there completely naked. This thoroughly shocked the ship's cat, which kept up a piteous wailing within a few feet of me all night long. Twice I chased it down the deck, the natives on watch thinking that I had gone slightly mad. Another night like that and I would have gone completely mad.

At 4 a.m. punctually, we were on our way in one of those cars that seem to defy all the ordinary laws of science and nature. I don't think it was any particular make. It performed the most astonishing feats of acrobatics, bouncing over boulders with the ease of a gazelle, describing figures of eight in the sand, balancing on two wheels to avoid lorries returning empty from Asmara and packing cases dumped in the middle of the track, squeezing through openings half its own width. And all the time the driver kept up a ceaseless chorus with his hooters, to make sure that we didn't steal a wink of sleep.

Suddenly out of the blackness would emerge a string of camels, by day and by night playing their silent, uncomplaining rôle in this grim pantomime. Sometimes a ghostly figure in white would loom up in the glare of our headlights, a lonely traveller on his way to Asmara or Massowah. Occasionally we would lose the track altogether, only to bounce and tumble and somersault our way back to it again. Soon after leaving Massowah we passed an aerodrome which I had seen through the glasses as we approached from the sea. There were signs of activity inside the hangars even at this hour. Outside were scattered a score of newly arrived and unopened crates.

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Presently we left the low, inhospitable coastline and began to climb. The track started to assume some semblance of a road. As the first pale streaks of dawn diffused the blackness with grey, we could gradually distinguish something of the country. At first it was scrubby, with no big trees and very little green. Then, as we zigzagged higher, and we found it was cold without jackets, the road threaded its way through luxuriant undergrowth.

The foothills in turn gave way to what appeared to be precipitous mountains towering thousands of feet above us. Our car was a keen mountaineer as well as a superb steeplechaser, for the steeper the climb the more it seemed to enjoy it. As we looked down below and at the steep peaks around we seemed to be sailing on great galleons above a sea of white foam. In the early morning sunshine the scene was unforgettable, reminding one of the road that takes you to the top of Mount Wilson in California. Several times as we rounded sharp bends of the road we surprised families of baboons at breakfast, the mothers scuttling their youngsters off to safety while fathers, uncles, and elder brothers remained to make menacing gestures as we passed. We did not see as much bird life as I expected. There were grouse, pigeons and even sparrows, but little else.

The journey took five and a half hours. Practically all of that time we were climbing steeply. Not once did the engine boil over or make any other sign of protest. I wish I had made a note of the make, but somehow I felt it was a mongrel. A thoroughbred would have rebelled long before we reached the Plain of the Thousand Villages.

The last hour and a half before we reached the high plateau we had to pick our way between thousands of natives widening the old road to Asmara. The task

## ABYSSINIAN ADVENTURE

will be a tremendous one. It will take months to make it sufficiently wide to cope with the traffic that will have to pass over it. But already hundreds and thousands of tons of war materials have passed along it.

At last we stopped climbing. The landscape was now flat, the soil red and sandy. Suddenly a tall red tower broke the skyline. We were approaching Asmara.

## CHAPTER VI

### NO ESCAPE FROM ERITREA

IT was 9.30 a.m. when we pulled up at the Italia Hotel, Asmara. Signor Alfredo Menghetti, a genial mine host who has spent 35 years at Asmara (and has completely retained his sanity), and was at the Hotel Cecil in London before that, told us that he hadn't a spare bed in the place and that Italian Majors and Colonels were sleeping on camp beds in the dining-room. We were too tired and exhausted (I hadn't slept for three nights) to be affected by news of this sort. All I wanted was a cup of coffee. This was quickly supplied and I was dozing off in the lounge (with pseudo-Burmese carvings, enormous Japanese vases and dusty bamboo chairs and tables on a concrete floor) when Signor Menghetti announced that a guest was leaving unexpectedly at midday and he would then be able to put up two beds.

I slept till four, but a bath was out of the question because Asmara was also suffering from a grave water shortage and the authorities only allowed one jugful per person per day. Even the lavatories were out of order. These things, however, were only minor discomforts of our stay in Eritrea.

The first thing that strikes you about Asmara is the effort it requires to walk upstairs or tie up your shoelaces. A short walk down the Corso del Re, and I was exhausted. "Everybody feels like that at first in Asmara, but it's really very healthy," we were told. There were one or two Englishmen staying, or rather were stranded, at the Hotel Italia. Asmara, like Massowah,



is a place you can't get out of once you get there. One of these Englishmen was trying to get back to England and in desperation was planning to escape via Khar-toum and from there by Imperial Airways to Croydon.

He was one of those people with a Pet Theory. I like people with Pet Theories, providing you don't have to listen to them too often. The Pet Theory of this Englishman was that if the nations of the world adopted the metric system all the troubles of humanity would be ended. The Abyssinian lion would lie down with the Italian lamb, the Frenchman and the German would embrace rapturously when meeting in the street, and cry "Heil Hitler! Bravo Laval!" The world would be divided into counties and an international police force would secure peace and good will (and the metric system) amongst all men.

My friend had written to Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Winston Churchill, as well as to the Editor of *The Times*, but for some reason or other his letters had been ignored. I assured him that if I got back to England safely I would see what could be done about it all.

After I had been at Asmara a few days I began to think I was developing Pet Theories myself. They seemed to flourish at this high altitude. It was all very well not being able to wash more than once a day and having to queue up for meals (all Menghetti's waiters had joined up and Italian officers had to be served before foreign journalists) and to wait three quarters of an hour to buy a stamp at the post office. One expected to find things like this. But of all the different shortages the most annoying was that of Information. Nobody could tell you anything, except the time. There was no British Consul. The shipping clerks had gone entirely mad. Every car in Eritrea had been commandeered by the Government.

The only thing to do was to go and see Signor Butturini, *Segretario Particolare*, S.E. l'Alto Commissario, and produce my letter containing Mussolini's instructions and my credentials from the Embassy in London.

Government House looked like a small and rather dowdy colonial cousin of Buckingham Palace, guarded by two native sentries in their scarlet tunics. Eventually I found myself in an Assistant Under-Secretary's office, and with my French and his English made my mission known so satisfactorily that he was instantly convinced that I was a spy. The Assistant Under-Secretary grasped a sheaf of papers in his hand and left the room in a hurry. I waited, under the watchful gaze of Il Duce and Vittore Emmanuel III. Presently the Assistant Under-Secretary returned and grasped another sheaf of mysterious-looking papers. His expression was rather more grave. He again left the room hurriedly. Il Duce's watchful gaze became a penetrating cross-examination. Vittore Emmanuel III drew himself up to his full height (a little over five feet) and gave me a thunderous look. Should I wait here and face the consequences or make a bold dash for safety! No, the Government had commandeered the petrol. The next train did not go till Friday and this was only Wednesday. There would be no boat at Massowah in any case. Best to wait.

The Assistant Under-Secretary returned, replaced the sheaf of papers, and looked graver still. He sat down. "It is not possible to see Generale de Bono or Signor Butturini. You may send cablegram to newspaper. You will not say about troops and aeroplanes. You bring cablegram here to-morrow, please. Thank you."

I, in turn, thanked him profusely and hurried back to the hotel. Should I send a cablegram to the office with our agreed code for "Censorship won't allow

any stuff through"—*Please inform mother all well*—or should I wait till Aden and then send a cable which could be dated from Massowah? I decided on the latter course. This may sound a slightly immoral procedure, I realize, and one that might have caused all manner of perplexing moments at Northcliffe House. Supposing, for instance, my cablegram from Aden, ten days at least after my arrival at Massowah, describing King Amanullah's difficulties in finding a bed coincided with an announcement elsewhere that his ex-Majesty had had an operation for appendicitis in Rome? I would have to risk that.

I have said very little about Asmara. To give it its due one must record that it is neat, tidy and clean. In normal times life must proceed very serenely in the capital of Eritrea. The creeper-covered verandas of the trim little villas in which the Europeans live suggest peace and contentment within, although sometimes it is disturbed by the raucous screech of a pet monkey. The Italian women dress as smartly here as they do at home. There are two cinemas. There is a Fascist club. Mother Church, of course, has taken firm root and the first building one sees when approaching Asmara is the red campanile of the Roman Catholic Cathedral. Red, volcanic red, is the predominating colour of the country and the towns in the whole of this part of the world. The soil is red, and when the sun begins to sink and the glare gives way to a softer, kinder light, one sees that the buildings and pavements have a pink hue too.

You can buy anything in the shops of Asmara from drawing instruments to native-made Coptic crucifixes. There is also a suprising amount of Oriental junk offered at staggeringly low prices. The "Made in Japan" menace has got a complete grip of North and East Africa from Alexandria to Mogadiscio, taking in Abyssinia *en route*. The only English goods I saw

in Asmara were a Baby Austin, a Triumph motor bicycle, a typewriter and a camera. English manufacturers might do more business, I was told, if their catalogues were printed in the language of the country with whom they hope to do trade. This sounds rather obvious, but I imagine it is certainly worth trying.

One afternoon we strolled through the native quarter. A native employed by the Shell Co. took us into murky little hovels, with crumbling walls and roofs, where groups of whispering natives gathered round charcoal fires and old men hammered out delicate patterns in the silver which they had melted down from Marie Thérèse dollars. Some of the work was exquisite. The prices, thanks to my native guide, were reasonable. I bought two large crucifixes and six small ones. In the market-place we saw the women having their hair curled in the curious local style, rather *à la Dolores del Rio*. It is not without its attractiveness and English women might well derive a few hints from the coiffure of the Eritreans. It is minutely platted in straight lines and swept back from the forehead and gathered at the back. To give the hair a gloss it is thickly soaked in rank butter, which is not quite so attractive to the nose as to the eye.

Outside a native house we saw a group of women sitting in a semicircle beating their chests, weeping and emitting a hideous wailing sound, while two other women, the leaders and conductors of this melancholy choir, paced up and down the centre of the semicircle goading them on to renewed efforts. They were professional mourners. Every few minutes the relatives of the deceased appeared at the door while sounds of revelry could be heard from within.

Asmara, like most towns in this part of the world, has its Mystery Man. In appearance he is a mixture of

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Venizelos, Sir Basil Zaharoff and the ex-Kaiser (post-War period). We used to see him strolling leisurely up and down the Corso del Re, with a stick and a slight limp, stopping every few paces to take stock of his surroundings. We noticed that he was greeted by everyone with a certain deference. I inquired who he was and I was told that this was the man who inspired and built the Massowah-Asmara Railway, one of the great engineering feats of the day, and carried out in the face of considerable Government opposition.

After three days at Asmara it began to dawn upon us that we, too, were imprisoned. There was no escape via Karachi for us. We settled down to a routine of exquisite boredom. One awoke at 7 o'clock ; coffee (the coffee at Asmara, let it be said, cannot be beaten) and one piece of toast (burnt) with goat's butter in one's bedroom ; a shave, a partial wash, no bath. 9 a.m. : ask Signor Menghetti to ring up the shipping agent and inquire whether the boat for Aden has arrived and when it is due to leave. Same reply each morning, agent not arrived at office yet but will ring hotel as soon as he does. 10 a.m. : walk round to agent's office. Same scene, same dialogue, every morning. The agent sits with his back to us at typewriter.

ME (*with forced smile*) : Good morning, signor.

AGENT : Good morning, gentlemen; what can I do for you ?

ME : Any news ?

AGENT : Nothing.

ME : Do you think there will be a boat to-day ?

AGENT (*with gesticulations*) : Perhaps, who can say ?

ME (*desperately*) : Cannot the office at Massowah tell us *anything* ?

AGENT (*with maddening complacency*) : They do not know any more than you or I. I will ring you at the hotel when I have news.

From 10.30 to 12 I try to write in my diary. I send post cards to everybody in Europe whose address I know ; I smoke endless Eritrean cigarettes of Greek manufacture and wish I had not offered my last Gold Flake to the King of Spain ; I sip one *Americano* ; I have a row about the price of the laundry ; I practise my Italian by trying to decipher the contents of *Il Quotidiano Eritreo* and feel I am progressing when I spot such homely-looking words as Simon, Eden, Hitler and *Morning Post* ; I look at the Rate of Exchange only to see Londra descending lower and lower. At 12 a feeling of emptiness prompts me to replenish with *risotto carciop alla Grindia* and *Manzo bocillo*. This is washed down with a glass of feeble German beer to induce sleep in the afternoon. There is nothing to read except the English-Italian dictionary, the preface of which I can repeat by heart.

Outside, in the streets, everybody was saluting everybody else. The troops had shaken off the dust of Massowah, and their tunics and boots looked a little less new. They were becoming acclimatized. All day long a steady procession of lorries thundered, without silencers, up and down the Corso del Re. Troops and stores were being hurried towards the frontier. By night, as well as by day, the air was filled with the roar of fast fighting planes and bombers manœuvring overhead. The natives were greatly impressed by "Mussolini's birds".

At tea-time my metric system friend would waylay me and we would go over all the old ground again. He became positively fanatical about it and one day seized upon poor Evans. He was convinced that at last he had found a convert. Evans listened with rapt attention and frequent "Aye, aye, sirs." And then, allowing our metric friend to lean back and take several proud and expectant pulls at his pipe, remarked : "Wouldn't

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it be simpler for everyone, sir, if we *all* had pounds, shillings and pence and kept to the left side of the road as well?" Our metric friend collapsed deep into his bamboo chair. What more could be said? It was the last we heard of the metric system.

At 6.20 exactly each day there was a brief interlude in our routine of boredom. It was announced by the strains of a brass band. The band belonged to the Native Guard and was on its way to perform the solemn ceremony of changing the guard at Government House. It was the signal for the entire hotel to rush out to see the fun. With a swaggering gait, in pink fezes and bare feet, the natives swung down the hill from the barracks and wheeled with perfect precision round the Corso del Re to Government House. Arrived there they halted, the officer of the guard approached the sentry-boxes, the sentry on duty would be pushed gently aside by the officer of the guard who would also point to the various positions that each of the other sentries were to take up. A bugler (slightly off the note) sounded the reveille while the red, green and white flag of Italy was hauled down. The old guard then fell in behind the band and off they swung down the Corso del Re back to barracks. We then returned to our routine of boredom and waited until 6.20 p.m. the next day.

Not the least annoying feature of our imprisonment at Asmara was the fact that one could not even go for a two-days' stay up country, because even twenty-four hours' absence from Asmara might mean the arrival and departure of our boat for Aden.

Only once did we succeed in bribing a native driver to take us twenty-five miles into the country, in the direction of Adowa. It gave us some idea of the conditions under which the Italians will have to carry out their northern campaign against the Abyssinians. The road itself was narrow but passably good, and there

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were one or two modern bridges. The only vegetation we saw were cacti which grow to an enormous size. There were some fine old acacia trees, typical of this part of the world, but otherwise the ground was rocky and dry and the horizon unbroken by a single artesian well. It was difficult to understand why Italy had not been at more pains to develop this great plateau, once so fertile, and known as the Plain of a Thousand Villages. In 1875 the Egyptians plundered and ravaged the entire countryside in their wars with the Abyssinians, leaving stark desolation behind, the men being killed and the women and children sold into slavery. Lack of water, rinderpest and foot-and-mouth disease (in spite of the efforts of the veterinary clinic at Asmara) are the chief reasons given to-day for Eritrea's failure as a colony. Even during the Fascist regime trade has not improved, and imports have decreased from 207 million lire in 1929 to 176 million in 1933.

The real importance of Eritrea, of course, is a strategic one. It contains within its borders the northern end of a great mountain range which runs from north to south along the eastern border of Abyssinia. Italy's possession of this high ground has been of inestimable value in her preparations during the last six months. An assault on this plateau from the flats of Massowah would have been well-nigh impossible. At Asmara, Italy has been able to acclimatize her troops to the altitude, organize her supplies and to build roads up to the frontier. It is generally accepted, too, that Mussolini intends to open his campaign by attacking and occupying Adowa, which is only twenty miles across the frontier.

One morning news arrived which temporarily revived our drooping spirits. A boat had arrived at Massowah on its way to Aden. We rushed madly round to the agent's office. Yes, it was true.



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ME (*with unforced smile*) : Shall we get a car down to-day ?

AGENT : There's no hurry.

ME (*with fading smile*) : When do you expect the boat to sail ?

AGENT : I don't know. It might be another seven days.

ME (*in despair*) : What shall we do ?

AGENT (*with maddening complacency*) : I will ring you up at the hotel when I have more news.

Even Northcliffe House, by now, was getting agitated. At Asmara, when a cable arrives, the telegraph boy, instead of going to the address indicated, accosts every European in the street, in the shops, and in the cafés, until he finds the one he is looking for. One day a cable arrived for me from the office.

*If telegraph impossible send impressionistic leader page article earliest mail.*

The optimism of Northcliffe House was the most refreshing thing about my stay at Asmara.

At last, just before the end of our enforced exile, I really began to think that my reason was being affected. It happened quite simply. A small crowd had gathered outside the hotel. We rushed out to see what had happened. People were staring at one of the wheels of a car and I expected to see some unfortunate creature trapped beneath. Nothing of the sort. It was a puncture. And we all waited to watch the man change the wheel.

There was very nearly a last-minute hitch before we finally bade good-bye to Signor Menghetti at Asmara. I was called to the phone to speak to the shipping agent.

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AGENT : Everything is arranged and you will have a nice cabin on the *Himalaya*.

ME : That's fine. Shall I collect my ticket at the office at Massowah to-morrow ?

AGENT (*with maddening complacency*) : Oh, you needn't hurry. The boat won't be sailing for two or three days yet.

ME (*firmly and finally*) : I am going down to Massowah to-night even if the boat doesn't sail for a month and I have to sleep on barbed wire on the quay.

It was almost too good to shake the pink dust of Asmara off one's shoes but it was with sinking heart that we descended once more into the Turkish bath humidity of Massowah. ("You find this hot? You ought to be here in August.") The journey down took five hours, but if our driver had had his way it would have taken less than five minutes. We passed two lorries that had left the road, happily without loss of life. The *Himalaya* looked impressively large and clean after the *Cagliari*, but our hopes of getting away quickly were shattered when the Captain informed us that he would be unloading for at least another three days. He said that we could sleep and have breakfast on board, however, and these concessions were the only things that made our second exile bearable.

On the night of our return to Massowah, there was a minor international "incident," which led to a French destroyer's hurried departure early the next morning. The Italian sailors had entertained the French sailors to a dinner at the Savoia. The charge per head was five lire. The following night the French sailors returned the compliment. The charge was seven lire. It was a foolish piece of greediness on the part of the *maitre d'hôtel* of the Savoia, and it was lucky

for him that the French sailors behaved as well as they did about it.

Our second Massowah nightmare lasted five days. From 9 a.m. till 4 p.m. the sun scorched down with appalling fierceness. All night through the donkey-engines and cranes of the *Himalaya* groaned and strained with their loads of war materials. Natives in loin-cloths toiled uncomplainingly, like robots, by day and by night. There was no prospect of sleep in the cabin, even with the fans working full blast, door and ports open, and no pyjamas. But by now I was quite accustomed to going without food and sleep.

I only have a very vague recollection of what we did during those five days. We walked up and down the streets. We sat in the cafés. I sent off more post cards.

The shops with their tawdry Japanese fancy goods, shoes, shirts and shorts, were doing a roaring business. The *maître d'hôtel* of the Savoia, for the first time in history, was obliged to turn clients away in hundreds. As there were only two native waiters (both of whom were amateurs) to cope with at least a hundred lunches and dinners each day, the business of eating was a somewhat slow and laborious procedure enlivened by frantic calls for *Frutta*, *Burro* and the like. One day I ate something at the Savoia which did not agree with me. Consequently for the following forty-eight hours I was able neither to eat nor to leave the ship. It was at least a break in our routine of boredom.

In the evenings we sat with the sailors from the Italian destroyers and played can-can outside the café in the piazza. They were a decent crowd, but not as smart or as lively as English sailors. They drank coffee instead of beer and behaved in a model way altogether. Possibly this was due to the fact that their pay is only a few pence per day.

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The military and naval police at Massowah had taken elaborate precautions to keep the native brothels out of bounds. Most of the Eritrean women were said to be diseased. We saw very few pretty native girls in the streets, and when I tried to photograph them they quickly covered their faces and ran away.

At last it was announced that the *Himalaya* would definitely leave that evening for Aden. One had grown a little sceptical about such statements, however, and we were in no mood to accept information without considerable reservations. When the clerk from the shipping office appeared he asked us if we had been vaccinated, and furthermore, if we *had* been vaccinated, had we a certificate to that effect? If such certificates were not forthcoming the Company regretted that we would not be allowed to sail for Aden on the *Himalaya*. If it was too late to find a doctor there would be another boat in ten days' time.

The idea of having a second injection, in Massowah of all places, filled me with hot rebellion. There was still an hour or two before we were due to sail. Problem: Find a doctor and bribe or blackmail him into signing a certificate. I was lucky. A very courteous native policeman took me to the doctor who was at that very moment getting out of his car to go aboard a troopship which had just arrived from Naples. He immediately took me to his office and stamped my passport to the effect that I had been vaccinated.

It was too good to be true. But what about the revolver? I was determined that even if I had to leave all the rest of my belongings at Massowah, as a token of my thankfulness at leaving the "Venice of the South," I would not on any account present my solitary firearm to the Italian Government. It would be much fairer to give it to the Abyssinians. I went to the Customs office. It was closed. I hurried to the police. They

could not help me, but if I went to the Savoia I might find someone there who knew where the Customs Inspector could be found. *Antonio* was not there but I might find *Ugo* at the café in the Piazza. No, he had just gone out, but had I asked *Giacomo*. *In questa città non conosco nessuno*, I protested in my best Hugo. It had no effect. The only person to see was *Michele* and almost certainly he had gone up to Asmara to see *Tomaso*. Well, try *Cristoforo*, he lived up the other end of Massowah. It was far too hot to get worried. At last I found somebody who settled the matter quite finally. The Customs would be closed till eight. The *Himalaya* sailed at eight. I returned to the ship and tried to drown my annoyance in a double lemon-squash. It was quite obvious that nobody in Eritrea was going to take any notice of Sir Austen Chamberlain's request to allow me to "pass freely without let or hindrance."

There was a last ray of hope. The *Himalaya* would not sail, after all, till nine. At eight I presented myself at the Customs office. At five minutes past I walked out with my revolver. Sir Austen had triumphed.

## CHAPTER VII

### SURPRISES AT ADEN

MY feelings were mixed as we slid, rather stealthily and a little furtively, out of the steaming heat of Massowah into the cool breezes of the Gulf of Aden. It was like waking up from a nightmare at the very moment when one was tumbling over the top of a cliff. To escape from that insufferable boredom, the agony of those days and nights, what did it matter in which direction the *Himalaya* headed? Eritrea would be for ever stamped on my mind as the most detestable strip of country on the surface of the earth.

The following afternoon we arrived at Aden. I expected to hate it almost as much as Massowah. I was entirely wrong in my forebodings, but I realized, after my first hour ashore, why Aden has this evil reputation amongst globe-trotters. On first acquaintance it suggests a ragged, sprawling Gibraltar. Actually it is a huge crater, long since inactive. Queen Victoria sits securely on her throne, half hidden amongst the only greenery you can find at Aden, and smugly surveys the first colonial acquisition of her reign. She watches, too, the endless cavalcade of water-carts which the camels drag down from the hills, for there is no water at Aden. A waste space in front is infested with money-changers and taxi-drivers by day, and by footballers of every race and creed by night. Behind Queen Victoria there is a ragged collection of shops, shipping offices, shabby hotels and a freak show. This feature of the town is known as the Crescent. At the freak

show one pays sixpence to see a pair of "Genuine Mermaids" which turn out to be rather smelly seals stuffed with camphor. Another of these slightly obscene monsters is on view, without charge, at the Crescent Hotel.

So much for Steamer Point. The other Aden, known as Crater Town, is up in the hills and is approached through a long, dirty tunnel, cut out of the grey volcanic rock. It is a dreary little township built in the amphitheatre of the long-extinct volcano, with its Arab and Jewish quarters, a derelict barracks, a still more derelict Protestant Church of Victorian-Gothic architecture and a Franciscan convent. For liner passengers who have one hour ashore, there are the crater tanks, enormous concrete bowls which catch the rain, and act as football forums in the dry season. I found a bookshop where, on inquiring for English books, I was offered Hall's and Stevens's "Algebra for Schools" (of unhappy memories) and a small volume of American uplift entitled "Soul Surgery." I discovered, too, where Fords go to when they develop *angina pectoris*. I somehow hope that mine will merit a kinder fate when its work for me is done.

But Aden has its compensations, as I shall endeavour to convey. What town in the world is there, for instance, where one can buy 1,500 Virginian cigarettes for 37s., which in London would cost £3 15s.? Or where, other than at Aden, could one have two dozen silk shirts made to measure, within forty-eight hours, costing only five shillings each? Or a Shantung suit, fitting better than anything that came out of Savile Row, in one day, and costing under £1? And where, I hear someone saying, except at Aden, does one have to pay five shillings a mile for taxis?

Yes, Aden has its compensations and also its surprises. You never know whom you are going to

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meet there. Let me explain. I had been to the telegraph office on the quay to send off an account of the scenes at Massowah to the *Daily Mail* (which the Indian operator afterwards described to me as a "very sweet composition"), and as I came out I noticed a youngish-looking man strolling along the quay. He was tall, lithe and straight-backed, and was wearing a wide-brimmed sombrero. I knew that figure well. Then he turned round, and, although this was Aden and of all the places on earth the least likely in which to find him . . . it was Bernard Shaw. To be doubly assured that the sun had not affected me in some strange way I went straight up to the great man.

ME : Mr. Shaw, you won't remember me, but . . .  
(a poor opening effort, which made me reflect afterwards on the tendency to say small things at big moments).

G. B. S. : Let me see. Where did we meet?

ME : At Exeter, a few years ago. I'm on the *Daily Mail*.

G. B. S. : Are you one of the great Harmsworths?

ME : One of the Harmsworths, Mr. Shaw, but not one of the *great* ones, yet. (This sounded much worse than my opening effort.)

G. B. S. : What did we talk about at Exeter?

ME : You told me to change my name if I wanted to become a successful journalist.

G. B. S. : Yes, and I meant it. What did you do?

ME : I adopted a *nom-de-plume*, signed a contract with an American magazine, wrote for it for two years and then it went bust, without paying me half they owed me.

G. B. S. (*laughing*) : Did you decide to call yourself Harmsworth after that?



## ABYSSINIAN ADVENTURE

ME : No, I decided to give your advice a second chance. I wrote an autobiography for somebody else to sign.

G. B. S. : Did it sell ?

ME : Four editions, a Foyle lunch, and two libel actions.

G. B. S. : Well done ! You must sign it Harmsworth next time. What are you doing here ?

ME : Looking for a war.

G. B. S. : You're a bit too soon. But it's bound to come. Mussolini means blood. Don't forget if it is White *v.* Black, we shall have to come in with the Italians.

An impatient blast from the *Llangarry Castle*, and a nervous look from Mrs. Shaw waiting in the launch, brought our little talk to an abrupt conclusion, and G. B. S. sped down the steps like a two-year-old. Our entire conversation only lasted three minutes and the meeting was so wildly improbable that I wondered, afterwards, whether I had dreamed the whole thing.

After the Shaw encounter Aden seemed to fall rather flat. The cinema was not functioning on either of the two nights we were there, so instead we took a taxi to Sheikh Othman, which is about nine miles by road from Steamer Point, but appears to be only a stone's throw across the bay to the mainland. At the end of the evening I had to pay a fare of staggering size.

At the approach to Sheikh Othman we passed ghostly pyramids of salt and many of those quaint windmills which are familiar landmarks to every traveller in the Greek Archipelago. Sheikh Othman is quite a modern township of some 10,000 inhabitants, with few, if any, European inhabitants. It boasts, however, a petrol station and a well-known character, an Arab,

who speaks English fluently. His name is Joseph. Our driver conducted us immediately to his house, which, like every other house in Sheikh Othman, is a white, one-storied building consisting of a small parlour-bedroom, the walls of which were decorated with posters advertising everything from White Horse whisky to the horrors of pyorrhœa ("four out of five have got it"). At the back there was a veranda which formed another bedroom, with primitive cooking and sanitary arrangements at the end of a small backyard. Our arrival at Joseph's house was the signal for the entire street to turn out and assemble in excited numbers outside. It was the age-old urge of baksheesh. Joseph poured us out whisky-and-sodas and made unsuccessful efforts to scatter the rowdy elements outside. He told us that business was bad, particularly since the garrison had been reduced. He did not indicate exactly what type of business had slumped, but we had already heard a good deal about slumps of various kinds while we were at Aden.

Presently we set forth on a tour of Sheikh Othman. The open-air cafés were well patronized by sleepy, somewhat dazed-looking loafers, all of whom were men, chewing *ghat* and sipping coffee. Everything was very orderly, there was no music, and nobody took any particular notice of anybody else. We sat in one of these cafés, drank very strong coffee, and afterwards Joseph said he would take us to see some friends. We found ourselves again in a small front parlour, but this was more feminine in *décor* and there were three beds. Joseph asked us to wait. He returned in a few minutes accompanied by an Arab woman of uncertain age but unmistakable profession. Such charms as she might have once possessed were elaborately and cunningly concealed beneath voluminous blouses and skirts of violent hue. Joseph was obviously

delighted, but he could not understand why we did not share his enthusiasm. We drank more very strong coffee and our hostess pressed us to chew *ghat*. Presently she unlocked a battered-looking trunk which served the triple purpose of wardrobe, washstand and dining-table, and changed her blouses and scarves for others of even more violent hue. She then proceeded to execute a curious shuffling sort of dance, intended apparently to exhibit the panther-like grace and flexibility of her ample hips. The dance required a certain amount of dexterity to avoid the three beds, the trunk and three people within a space not more than ten feet square. We all applauded and I, for one, felt slightly uncomfortable. I wondered whether she was going to sit on my knee. Instead, she smiled and in excellent English bade us good night. Joseph got up to go and motioned to us to follow. The night was yet young and he had many other charming friends. We walked along dim streets and eventually arrived at a house on the edge of the desert. Again we found ourselves in a small parlour-bedroom, but this time there were two beds and the curtains were made of pale blue silk. The walls were decorated with photographs and cigarette cards of male film stars.

Joseph, who apparently had the entrée of every house in Sheikh Othman, disappeared for a few minutes as before and returned with a young Arab girl. She was slender, small, probably about twenty years of age, very highly made up about the eyes and mouth, had long scarlet nails, and wore a silk shawl round her head. Joseph assured us that she was "very special", and, though her admirers were legion, she was apt to be rather cold.

But to-night she had apparently thawed, for she promptly jumped on my knee, entwined her arms round my neck, stroked my hair, kissed me on the eyes,

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cheeks and mouth, and made quaint crooning noises in my ear. Her voice was as ugly as that of most Arab women.

A gramophone was next produced from somewhere under the bed and our charmer proceeded to give us, with many twirlings and pirouettes, a little solo interpretation to the strains of "Stormy Weather." She was as graceful as a butterfly. Our applause, this time, was entirely genuine. She gave us an encore with the "Shadow Waltz," a more voluptuous affair full of subtle little hesitations. At the end of the second dance she went to the mirror and changed her shawl. The purpose of this was to show us the quality and fine blackness of her hair which fell to her shoulders. But she reserved the final *dénouement* till later in the evening, after we had consumed numerous more cups of strong coffee and listened to all the old gramophone tunes of three years ago.

Unlocking a trunk she produced a flimsy garment which might have been a blouse, a shirt or a pyjama coat. It was quite transparent. She then removed the top part of her clothing, to change, apparently, into the flimsier, more seductive garment. Boldly she displayed the slender lines of her tiny torso for our admiring gaze. Joseph smiled and looked at each of us in turn. I looked at Evans. Evans looks at me. We both looked again at the figure in front of us. Yes, it was a boy.

No doubt if we had remained longer at Aden, Joseph could have given us many other surprises, but our stay was abruptly terminated by news that a boat had arrived unexpectedly and would leave for Mogadiscio within three hours. This necessitated some rapid calculating and preparations. We received a message from the Captain that the *Brenta* had 2,500 tons of petrol and oil aboard and that we would

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travel at our own risk. On no account would we be allowed to smoke except in the saloon where the temperature would be insufferable. I had visions of a kind of Boston Tea Party at Mogadiscio, with my 1,500 cigarettes and 150 cigars being dumped into the sea by enraptured Italian Customs officials.

The next boat was due in ten days. I decided that a spectacular death in a blazing tanker in the Indian Ocean would be preferable to further delays, and accordingly, with two new suitcases (made in Japan and costing 10s. each) to swell the growing number, we boarded the *Brenta* half an hour before sailing into the Gulf of Aden on the last lap of our long journey south.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SO THIS IS MOGADISCIO

THE only remarkable thing about our voyage on the *Brenta* was the fact that there was quite a fair chance of our being blown into Eternity at any moment. She was a dirty old tramp steamer, dirtier even than the *Cagliari*, much battered and worn by lumbering up and down the Congo coast. Now, however, she had taken on a fresh and glorious lease of life as a military transport.

The skipper, a powerful Captain Kettle type of fellow with a voice like Jove and a laugh that shook the sides of the ship, was obviously a little apprehensive about his cargo. So was Capo, the Chief Engineer, a genial fellow of vast proportions, whose shantung shirt looked like a map of the Sahara. I think they would have shot any one of us if we had been found smoking on deck, and they would have been quite right if they had. There were only two other passengers besides Evans and myself, both Italians. Each was rather secretive about his business and not a little suspicious, naturally, about ours.

The Indian Ocean was on its best behaviour, with the monsoons not due for another six weeks, and we were in sight of the brown inhospitable coast-line of British Somaliland on our first day out. There was infinite relief in the knowledge that we would not be making a call there. Berbera suggested even worse things than Massowah.

Before rounding Cape Guardafui (which boasts a

tiny lighthouse that has been attacked on three occasions by Somalis, the unfortunate occupants being killed and *eaten*), and dipping due south for Mogadiscio, we made a stop at a lonely Italian outpost of Empire, Bender Cassim. It consists of two ruined forts, a former Sultan's castle, a wireless station, an incense factory (which provides all the incense for the Vatican) and a few straggling Somali habitations. A new road was being built to Mogadiscio and twenty miles inland an important Italian air base was being completed. This was the destination of a considerable quantity of our cargo. The landing arrangements were of the crudest. Four native *dhow*s, charmingly picturesque but quite impractical, journeyed to and fro, with laborious slowness, carrying four dozen barrels of oil apiece. The distance to the shore was about a mile. The unloading took a whole day. The Somalis worked quietly and conscientiously without unduly hurrying themselves. One could not blame them for that because the heat was indescribable. They are a gentle, friendly people, slenderly built and often with quite aristocratic features. Their courage and fortitude is astonishing. One boy lost the ends of two fingers during the unloading. He carried on as if nothing had happened. A typical example of their powers of endurance is recorded by Captain Hudson, I.M.S., in the *Quarterly Journal of the Mystic Society*.

"A Somali was shot by the enemy, and the bullet penetrated just below his stomach and came out to the right of his vertebral column behind. He was then speared in five places. One spear wound ripped up his abdomen and let out twelve feet of gut, another wound cut his right thigh, and a third almost into his left shoulder joint; and there were many other smaller wounds. The big wounds were six or seven inches long and two inches deep. This man crawled

## SO THIS IS MOGADISCIO

from twelve noon under a blazing sun, stark naked and trailing his gut behind him, until 5 p.m., when he was picked up and attended to. He recovered."

The Somali, however, with all his courage and utter disregard of danger, is highly strung and excitable and does not make as good a soldier as the Abyssinian.

At Bender Cassim we heard the usual wild rumours of arms being smuggled into Abyssinia. A day or two before we arrived a boat, disgorging guns and shells, had been seen by a native off the coast of British Somaliland. Two Japanese ships were said to have arrived at Djibuti a week or so earlier, heavily laden with ammunition for the King of Kings. Moreover, we were informed that war would officially commence on October the first.

Eventually, when we had lost all sense of time, distance, and space, and I was beginning to wonder whether my sanity or Evans' would go first, we arrived at Mogadiscio. It was Ash Wednesday, and exactly forty-six days after leaving London. You can travel to New Zealand in considerably less time than that. The journey from Aden had taken a week. It normally takes four days. We did not hurry ashore for the simple reason that there was no means of getting there, and swimming half a mile in a heavy swell, with the possibility of sharks, would have been indiscreet. We waited exactly two hours for the police. There were the usual forms to fill up. Again I had some difficulty in explaining that I had the same name as my father. Evans invented yet another maiden name for his mother.

These formalities concluded, we boarded a lighter and, in a heavy swell, made our way slowly and, at moments, rather perilously, for the pier. Mogadiscio stands in the open roadstead of the Indian Ocean, and for several months of the year the monsoon makes



landing arrangements exceedingly dangerous. Ships have to move a mile out to sea. An attempt has been made to build a harbour, but the sea has made short work of this. Compared to Massowah, Mogadiscio presented a peaceful, lazy atmosphere, basking serenely in the glaring sunshine. Not more than a dozen ships lay at anchor half a mile or so from the shore. Two of these were ex-liners on which some 1,500 troops were quartered for lack of suitable accommodation ashore. The other boats were mostly of the *Brenta* class, and two were flying the Union Jack. Only the crudest landing arrangements existed, consisting of native *dhow*s which plied laboriously slowly between the shore and the ships. There was talk, we gathered, of installing a more modern and efficient system of lighters, but Mogadiscio will always be a bad spot for landing troops and war supplies in a hurry.

The Customs officers, as I expected, were flabbergasted when I declared 1,500 English cigarettes and 150 cigars. They proceeded to open each tin of fifty and weigh them cigarette by cigarette. The duty, I was informed, would bring the cost of each cigarette up to about threepence. I replied that I would prefer to present the whole consignment to the sharks. I was told that I had better wait to see the manager. This gentleman appeared much sooner than I expected, and immediately proceeded to lecture me on the evils of tobacco (he was a non-smoker himself) and allowed me to take all my cigarettes duty free on condition that I agreed to try and cut down my daily consumption. We met several times during my stay at Mogadiscio and each time he asked me how many cigarettes I had smoked that day.

There are two hotels in Mogadiscio, the Savoia, and the Croce del Sud. The latter, we were informed, was packed to the ceiling and it would be useless to try and

get sleeping space (no beds, of course) there. It was just possible, however, that the manager would let us sleep in the dining-room, as the lounge was already occupied by Air Force officers. In any case, we would have to walk there as all cars had been commandeered by the Government. With this hopeful prospect we started our weary trudge along the Corso del Re towards the town, with a cavalcade of laughing and chattering natives trotting behind us, carrying suitcases, my typewriter, camera, coats, hats, and a hundred other bits and pieces which refused to squeeze into my baggage after the Customs had, in two minutes, destroyed a whole morning's perfect packing on the part of Evans.

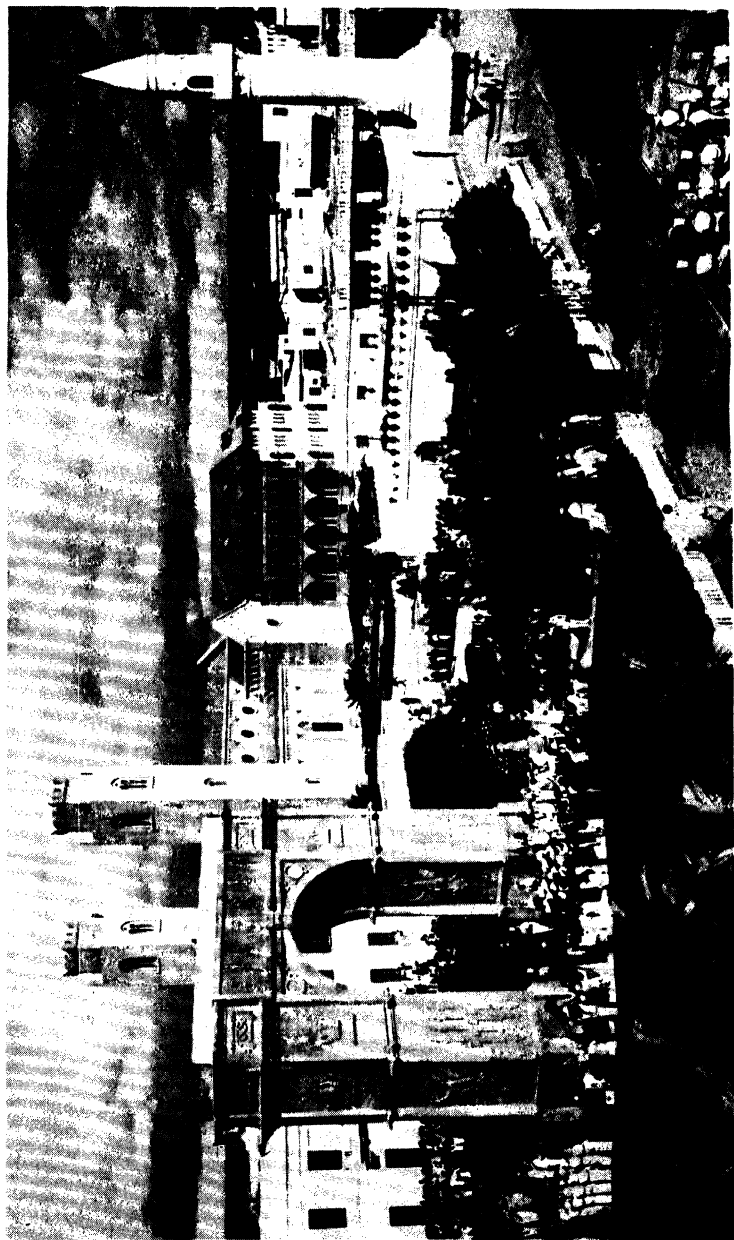
Hot and perspiring, we arrived at the Croce del Sud, to be told that there was not a bed in the place, and that all the chairs in the lounge were in use at night. The manager was genuinely sorry that he couldn't do anything for us, but that was the position. I enquired for the British Consul. He laughed. There was no British Consul in Italian Somaliland. Perhaps Mohammed Aly could help me, or Bess and Co., of Aden. I produced my letter from Mussolini to General Graziani. This was equally unavailing. It would perhaps be best to call and see the Governor's secretary at eight that evening.

At eight o'clock I presented myself at the Government Offices and was ushered into a large room with the usual portraits of Mussolini and Vittore Emmanuel III. By now I was able to bask in their frowns with complete calm. The door opened at the far end of the room and an officer of imposing size, in white with a considerable amount of gold braid, greeted me with the Roman salute. Even if he had not given me the Roman salute, I would have done so myself because there was something about his size and his bearing which seemed to demand it. He introduced

himself as General Graziani's aide-de-camp and immediately got down to business. I handed him my credentials from Rome. He would arrange, he said, for me to see His Excellency at the earliest possible moment, but I might have to wait two or three days. In the meantime he would inform the Croce del Sud that I was to be given a comfortable room, and to-morrow he would send one of his staff to help me in any way I needed. I thanked him profusely, gave him my best Roman salute, and hurried back to the hotel. It was a hopeful beginning.

If things moved slowly at Asmara, word travelled quickly enough at Mogadiscio. A large bedroom with a balcony and a shower-bath was ready for me within a few minutes of my returning to the hotel. Hungry as I was (we hadn't eaten since breakfast, and then only tea and biscuits), I decided that a shower was more imperative both on hygienic (the last bath I had was at Aden a week before) and practical grounds.

One of the main problems of life at Mogadiscio, I was to find, was this question of meals. There was one Italian waiter in the hotel restaurant and he had under him a dozen Somalis and Arabs. They looked smart in their white coats and red fezes, but unless you succeeded in getting one of the Arabs to look after your table there was little chance of getting anything to eat. The Somali waiter is excitable and easily gets flustered, which perhaps is not surprising when a dozen people at different tables are banging their forks and tapping their glasses in the vain hope of being served. The Arab waiter, on the other hand, keeps remarkably calm and does twice the amount of work in half the time and never gets flustered. On more than one occasion, when I was unfortunate enough to be left to the mercies of these Somalis, I had to go without lunch or dinner entirely, for the simple reason that there was nothing



Architectural Mayonnaise at Mogadiscio



(Left) Evans in full war-paint  
(Right) Our lorry refuses to move

left by the time they came to me. As I was usually the only civilian staying at the hotel, and a foreigner at that (not to mention a journalist), perhaps the Somalis were not always to blame. I tried appealing to the Italian head waiter, but the result of this was that he came to physical blows with the chef (who was in no way responsible) and consequently everybody, including most of the General Staff at Mogadiscio, had to go without the second half of their dinner that night. I tried other tactics after that.

Life at Mogadiscio begins, normally, at six o'clock. The sky at that hour is paralytically blue, but the sun does not attain its full tropical splendour till nearer midday. Everybody, therefore, takes advantage of these morning hours to do the business of the day. In times of emergency, however, the offices open again at eight, when it is cool without the damp humidity of Massowah, and business continues till perhaps midnight. It is easy enough to get used to starting one's day at 6 a.m., but, unfortunately, I arrived at Mogadiscio at the beginning of Lent. This entailed a most disagreeable form of penance in which all were compelled to share, whether you were within or without the Roman fold. Punctually at 5 a.m. every day the bells of the Cathedral (which is only a hundred yards from the hotel) commenced an ear-shattering clanging and jangling which continued with fierce intensity for ten minutes. This hideous performance was repeated thereafter at intervals till six o'clock. And as Easter approached the voice of those bells became more and more insistent, less and less harmonious. It was a horrible awakening to a new day.

I say awakening, although that is not quite the word I should use. Looking back at my fortnight's stay at Mogadiscio I am not conscious of having slept at night time at all. Probably I *did* sleep, just as soundly as those people who declare so emphatically that they

"didn't sleep a wink all night." But sleep was not easy. The heat was terrific, but not unbearable. Massowah had been a good training. The mosquitoes were bad, too, but not as bad as the flies. The latter had an uncanny way of getting inside the mosquito net overnight and concealing themselves in its folds till the early morning. They would then emerge from their hiding-places and commence to hop and crawl all over the most sensitive parts of one's anatomy, till one was thoroughly aroused and further thought of sleep was hopeless. By the time the flies had done their worst the bells began.

After breakfast, consisting of a glass of iced coffee, I set off on a tour of the town. There is not much to see. The first building that strikes the eye, as at Asmara, is the Roman Catholic Cathedral. It is the first thing you see as you approach from the sea, and the last as you leave. It is built in the pseudo-Byzantine-cum-Gothic style, and they say it cost half a million pounds, including the Bishop's Palace adjoining. This I can well believe. It is intended not only as a symbol of the power of Mother Church, but of Mussolini and the new Fascist Empire too. Farther down the street, a pretty street bordered with palms, there is a Mohammedan mosque. Until recently the minaret was crowned by the cross as well as the crescent. By night it is encircled with coloured lights which spell out to the astonished, sad-eyed Somalis, "*Viva il Duce.*"

Everything at Mogadiscio is sane and orderly (after Massowah and Asmara), neat and white. It is all a little like the old White City by day and Act II of a pre-war musical comedy by night. There are stucco replicas of Roman triumphal arches. Government House, the home of General Graziani, is white, too, and looks like an old Moorish palace. The gates are guarded by two splendid Dubats, an aristocratic tribe notable for their fine physique and good looks, in green

and gold uniforms, carrying huge curved swords. There are two open-air cinemas, a Fascist club, a tennis club (where they play by electric light), a modernistic war memorial, a wireless station, one or two expensive European shops, and an assortment of corrugated-iron stores selling everything under the sun, kept by prosperous-looking Indian and Arabian merchants. The streets are well surfaced (the town was tidied up a year or two ago for the visit of King Vittore Emmanuel), and most of them are named after Mussolini and members of the Italian Royal Family.

My first objective was the post office, where I hoped to send word to Northcliffe House announcing my arrival and asking for more funds. Owing to my sudden departure from Aden, I had not been able to attend to this urgent need, and consequently I arrived at Mogadiscio with only a few pounds in my pocket. The post office was besieged with soldiers sending off postcards to their sweethearts and wives, and it looked very doubtful whether I would be able to approach near enough to send my telegram, let alone explain in my Hugo Italian what I wanted. A young Air Force sergeant, however, came to my rescue, and as a result my telegram was dealt with promptly, but I was informed that I would have to get official permission before a Press telegram could be accepted. A fairly strict censorship, as I expected, was in force, but letters were not stopped unless one made reference to the military activities of Mogadiscio. As this was practically the only form of activity in Mogadiscio, it left very little else (except the bells) for one to write about, and as I had not been sent all the way to East Africa to write about bells for the *Daily Mail*, I decided it would be best to visit the Censorship Department as soon as possible.

When I returned to the Croce del Sud I was met by



## ABYSSINIAN ADVENTURE

an Italian officer, Captain Umberto Biroli, of the Autogruppo, who had been with the Ford Company and spoke English fluently. He was to make himself responsible, he told me, for the success of my visit to Italian Somaliland, and it was arranged that General Graziani would receive me the following evening. I found Captain Biroli a very congenial companion during my two visits to Mogadiscio, and but for his help and support it is very doubtful whether I should have been able to accomplish as much as I did. For his part, I am afraid he found me a constant source of worry and anxiety. I gave him very little peace at all, for it was to him I had to appeal when I wanted to send a telegram or secure another bedroom when they threatened to turn me out of mine, or to borrow a gun to shoot gazelle, or a tent for camping, or a lorry to go up country. I am sure he was mighty thankful that I was the only journalist Mussolini had permitted to visit Italian Somaliland.

"When is the war going to start?" I asked. I knew, of course, what the answer was going to be before I asked the question. I had asked it a thousand times already and a thousand times received the same reply, in Rome, Naples, Massowah, and Asmara. A shrug of the shoulders (as if nobody had heard the word war till I mentioned it), a raising of the eyebrows, and a vague "Who can say? Anyway, nothing will happen until October." I tried very hard to find out what was going on in the minds of these Italian officers whom I met in the hotel and in the cafés. They were obviously very much in earnest about the whole business, and there was no questioning the fact that they had been fired with something far stronger and deeper than mere spirit of adventure. Many of these officers wore ribbons that indicated (one or two of them were literally ablaze with decorations) that they had seen service in the Great

War. A war with Abyssinia would be little more than a field day for them. I came across only one Italian in Somaliland who gave me to understand that he would be glad when the present regime ended. He had, as I discovered later, some cause for being of that mind.

Every one of the many others with whom I talked declared their almost fanatical faith in Mussolini, and I discussed the subject with young men who came from old and distinguished families as well as with those who had exchanged a bank-clerk's life for this uncertain adventure in tropical Africa. "Wherever Mussolini leads us, we will follow." To those who would suggest that it is the blind leading the blind, they reply: "Look what Mussolini has done for Italy!" If you tell them that Italy is on the verge of bankruptcy, they reply, "We were let down at Versailles. Italy must have colonies too." If you ask them whether Italy hopes to make up for lost time by adding Abyssinia to her Colonial Empire, they say, "Who can tell what is in the mind of the Duce?" And so one goes round in circles.

After Massowah and Asmara, Mogadiscio presented a comparatively peaceful appearance. There was nothing of the "armed camp" atmosphere about this post-war White City. The streets certainly were full of soldiers, not quite so new-looking, but by now acclimatized to their heavy boots and clumsy rainproof tunics. But they looked cheerful enough tramping around the towns looking for curios (made in Japan) to send home. The week before I arrived, a number of Eritrean troops, who had already seen service in Libya, reached Mogadiscio and had been sent up to the frontier. They were mostly Christians and had been transferred here because the Abyssinians of the North are also mostly Christians, and it is believed (although not proved)

that Christian will not fight Christian, whether he be Abyssinian, Somali, or Eritrean.

It was impossible to estimate the number of troops, black or white, who were stationed at, or passing through, Mogadiscio while I was there. These were questions I could not ask ; but from what I could see myself they were not nearly as numerous as in Eritrea. This would suggest that it was proposed to concentrate the main offensive in the North. A glance at the map would support this theory. Eritrea is much more fortunately placed for striking at the heart of Abyssinia than Italian Somaliland. The Djibuti-Addis Ababa Railway would probably be one of the first objectives, and this could be reached comparatively easily by air near the British Somaliland border. There is Adowa, too, not many miles from the Eritrean border, where a victory for the Italians would have an immense moral effect at home as well as at the front. In Somaliland the position is very different. From Wal Wal to Harar, which would probably be General Graziani's first objective (supposing that simultaneous attack from the north and south were contemplated), is a distance of three hundred miles. Although an attack from the south would not involve such perilous marches as from the north, where cliff-like precipices and terrific gorges abound, there is the grave water problem of the Ogaden Desert. In those grim regions man cannot live unless he brings his own supplies of food and water.

For that reason General Graziani's first concern on his arrival in the colony was the building of roads. He had not conducted a highly successful campaign in Cirenaica without realizing the paramount importance of communications. His predecessors at Mogadiscio had entirely overlooked these trifling details. He set to work at once ; the task was a formidable one. Experts were summoned from Italy, England, and America.

It was going to be an engineers' war and General Graziani realized that success or failure depended almost entirely on these roads from the base to the frontier. One morning I went out with a Maltese engineer to see his experimental road which a few days later brought him a handsome contract from the Italian Government. The difficulty of making roads in Italian Somaliland, where most of the soil is soft and sandy, is to find a substance which will not only be strong enough to withstand the enormous loads which would pass over it, but not crack with the heat, sink, or get washed away by the rains. All of these problems the Maltese had successfully overcome, and it was this fact, I think, together with the thought of the commission which was awaiting him, that made him serenely calm in the face of all manner of discomfitures later on.

General Graziani had other serious problems to face besides lack of roads. Within a few days of my arrival there was a shortage of flour. Urgent appeals were sent to Kenya. This was followed by a shortage of potatoes, of sugar, of lemons, of ice (most maddening of all), of meat, and of every essential commodity of life in turn. The only thing we had in plenty was chianti. The shortage of sleeping accommodation I have already referred to, but its full seriousness I didn't realize till one day I walked down to the football ground. Unless I had been told it was the football ground I might have taken it for anything else. Every available square foot of ground was occupied by motor-lorries (the autogruppo), and in each of these lorries five or six soldiers slept every night. Apparently these appalling conditions did not damp their enthusiasm in the least. They all looked remarkably cheerful.

Night life in Mogadiscio consists of the cinemas, half a dozen open-air cafés (one of which had a gramophone

and a loudspeaker), and the native quarter. The latter had been placed out of bounds for the troops because of the too-eager attentions of the warm-blooded Italians for the pretty Somali girls. It was said, in fact, that no Somali girl dare venture abroad after dark for fear of being annoyed. Nevertheless, they *did* venture abroad after dark. In order to cope with this problem, a rumour (Mogadiscio was full of rumours) was current to the effect that Mussolini was sending out two hundred girls from Italy to supply the necessary feminine companionship for these lonely young Italians. Il Duce thinks of everything.

Some of the officers had brought their wives and families with them, while others came to another, and perhaps more convenient, arrangement. At Mogadiscio, as at other places I was to visit in that part of the world, lonely bachelors and grass widowers have found a solution of their domestic difficulties in the "madame" system. This may require a little explanation. Briefly, it consists of selecting a young Somali or other native girl between the ages of fifteen and twenty (they are unusually slender and graceful, with delicate features and wide-set eyes) and coming to an arrangement with her parents for the girl to act as housekeeper and "wife". It is quite a practical investment because the girl, in return for her board and keep and a few shillings a week as pocket-money, is responsible for the cooking and cleaning and all the affairs of the house. As a rule, these alliances prove entirely satisfactory, but I heard of one young officer who, desirous of being assured of the fidelity of his "madame" while he was away for a few days, locked her up in the flat ! Some of these girls are so exquisitely beautiful that I could fully appreciate his anxiety.

The social event of the week (apart from the electric-light tennis parties) was the first night of the new

programme at the open-air cinema. Actually there are two cinemas at Mogadiscio, but one enjoys the patronage of General Graziani himself and is considered, therefore, the right one at which to be seen. His Excellency has a special box at this cinema, and there is a railed-off part for the natives and another section specially reserved for the "mesdames". The equipment is rather ancient and necessitates an immense number of intervals in order to keep the projector from overheating or breaking down altogether. These intervals last, as a rule, longer than the films themselves. Nobody gets annoyed. It is all part of the evening's entertainment. Some of the films I saw were English with superimposed Italian voices. Occasionally this produced strange and comical effects : when, for instance, Tallulah Bankhead forsook her deep, husky tones and broke out in a high treble, "Bless you, darling." The news pictures, too, showed us events which had long since passed into history, a notable example being a scene in which Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford were shown in an intimate close-up at the opening of an art exhibition in Rome. Nobody seemed to notice the oddity of this situation. In any case, what did it matter how long ago these things happened in another world thousands of miles away? Besides, Mogadiscio refused to be shaken out of its lethargy by Mussolini or anybody else. The unit of time there, for centuries before dictators were heard of, had been a month, not a day. My sympathy was entirely with Mogadiscio.

## CHAPTER IX

### EVERY INCH A SOLDIER

**M**Y audience with His Excellency General Rudolfo Graziani, Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of Italian Somaliland, was fixed for eight o'clock in the evening at his office in the Government buildings. I had carefully prepared a list of questions beforehand with Captain Biroli, who was to act as my interpreter, and these I had set out in the following order :

1. Are Italy's East African colonies sufficient outlets for Italy's growing population ?
2. Is it proposed to settle some of this surplus population in these two colonies ?
3. Is Italy agreeable to having the frontier question settled by arbitration or the League of Nations ?
4. Is it proposed to retain indefinitely the present large number of troops in Somaliland and Eritrea ?
5. Are the present measures, sending troops, guns and aeroplanes, building roads, purely a precautionary measure ? Are more troops being sent ?
6. If there are any further frontier incidents, will Italy declare war ?
7. Will she carry any such campaign into the heart of Abyssinia ?

With this formidable questionnaire in my hand I presented myself at the office of General Graziani's

secretary at ten minutes to eight. Captain Biroli was already there. The secretary welcomed me in the name of the Governor and offered me a glass of *aqua minerale*. I have never been able to fathom the exact significance of this gesture, but I concluded that either I was looking faint, or that I required some kind of fortifier before confronting His Excellency. Anyway, I drank it.

Captain Biroli had outlined General Graziani's career to me beforehand, and I gathered, amongst many other things, that he was regarded as Italy's greatest living soldier, that he looked "every inch a soldier," and was born of sturdy peasant stock fifty-three years ago, that his father was a doctor and wanted his son to be a farmer, but that he became a soldier instead and went to Eritrea for seven years, where a bad snake-bite resulted in his being sent home. He distinguished himself highly in the Great War, I learned, but the real triumph of his career so far was the work he did in Libya from 1921 to 1924, reconquering Cirenaica for Italy. "The wind of the desert and the tempests of the Sirtica will not blot out the traces of your victorious path," wrote General de Bono at the time. In his book describing that campaign, General Graziani said :

"To-day, seeing again the flourishing towns, the fertile land, the rich grazing of the East Gebel ; to see Berberi always ready to fight in our service ; to hear the children converse in our tongue, sing the Fatherland's hymns . . . these are the fruits of real conquest."

A bell announced that His Excellency was ready to receive us, and half a minute later I was returning the Roman salute of General Graziani, who rose from his desk at the end of a dimly lit and heavily panelled room. But it was not the room I noticed in those first few



seconds, it was the gigantic height of Graziani, much accentuated by the white uniform and the sombre panelling. I remembered Captain Biroli's remark that he looked "every inch a soldier," and I calculated that there must be at least seventy-five inches of martial mind and muscularity before me. Having murmured my carefully rehearsed words of greeting (Captain Biroli with a dash of Hugo) which were obviously quite unintelligible to General Graziani, I settled down in my chair and endeavoured to look bright and intelligent while His Excellency (whom I will refer to as H. E. for short) addressed me in Italian and Captain Biroli supplied the answers. Unless you have indulged in this triangular, acrobatic form of conversation you may not realize how intensely difficult it is.

The first time I met Hitler in Berlin he plunged immediately into a long peroration on the evils of hostile newspaper propaganda, and my interpreter, although a personal friend of Hitler's, dared not interrupt the Führer to explain that I didn't speak German. The Führer was sailing along magnificently, but after some minutes something, probably the blank expression on my face, told him that I did not understand a word he was saying. And then he smiled.

General Graziani was under no such illusion, but the triangular conversation was no less difficult. He spoke gravely and with deliberation, unlike Hitler, who talks *at* you as if he were addressing a public meeting.

Two things were clear from the moment that H. E. took my hand in a firm grip, without a flicker of a smile crossing his handsome features that remind you a little of Lord Allenby. The first thing was that H. E. didn't want to give an interview to the *Daily Mail*. The second thing was that H. E. hadn't the least intention of giving an interview to the *Daily Mail*. And having made this quite clear, H. E. proceeded to interview *me*.

How old was I? Had I been to Oxford? Who was my father? How many newspapers did my Uncle Rothermere own? Had I had a pleasant trip? Was I comfortable at the Croce del Sud? How long did I propose staying in Italian Somaliland? Would I like to see some of the country? Would I like to have an interpreter to accompany me on a trip down to the Juba River and up to Lugh and back via Ischia Baidoa to Mogadiscio? And then perhaps take the same car up north to Berbera, to avoid the slow sea trip to Aden?

These questions were fired at me with bewildering rapidity, H. E. barely waiting for my replies to be translated back into Italian. The interview had turned into a searching cross-examination. I trembled to think of the faces at Northcliffe House if I sent a detailed account (at three shillings a word) of my talk with General Graziani. But that was quite out of the question because H. E., in answer to my inquiry, informed me that any cables I wished to send would first have to be brought to him, and these must not contain any reference to the military or political situation. I could describe *ad nauseam* the architectural charms of Mogadiscio, the beauty of the bells, the blueness of the sea and sky, the sad eyes of the Somali maidens. But I mustn't mention guns or aeroplanes, or tanks or lorries or soldiers. It looked as if my S O S telegram, *Please inform Mother all well*, would come in useful after all.

I thanked H. E. for his cordial reception and gladly accepted his offer of an interpreter and a military lorry. A car would have been out of the question (even if one were available), as I was to discover, for with the exception of the coast road to Brava, and the road to Ischia Baidoa, the only way of getting from place to place in Italian Somaliland is by lorry. I decided that it was

no good remaining in Mogadiscio any longer because there was nothing to see and little to write about, whereas in the Juba River district there was a fair chance of seeing some big game. The *Daily Mail*, admittedly, had sent me out as War Correspondent, but it was obvious that I was at least six months too early, and in any case, my hands were tied. There was no hope of getting a boat home for a fortnight, so I gladly seized the chance of a change of scene . . . and release from those accursed bells, which were becoming quite hysterical as Easter drew nearer.

My spirits revived too soon. I was forgetting that in Mogadiscio nothing hurries or will be hurried, by Mussolini, me, or anybody else. I had brought with me from Rome a new map of Italian Somaliland (showing Wal Wal inside Italian territory), and I spent the next morning exploring possible routes for a fortnight's journey through the country south, west and north of Mogadiscio. Meantime, Captain Biroli was scouting round for an interpreter, a lorry, and a native driver. In my innocence (and my faith in the efficiency of Fascist organization) I thought that these things could be produced by the raising of a little finger, particularly if that little finger belonged to the hand of His Excellency the Governor. I was to be speedily disillusioned.

Captain Biroli could not find an interpreter. He had asked H. E. for permission to come with me, but H. E. decided that he needed him in Mogadiscio. He had asked Prince Ruspoli, but he was leaving for Italy. There were only one or two Italian officers who could speak English, and these could not be spared from their duties. Not that there was any lack of volunteers, because the idea of escaping from the monotony of Mogadiscio, even for a few days, appealed to the most ardent young subaltern with his Balbo beard and spotless white drills as well as to the most seasoned old

campaigner ablaze with decorations. The trouble was they couldn't speak English, and only a little indifferent French. Then there was the question of a lorry ; this might take two or three days. Not to mention camp beds, mosquito-nets, cooking utensils, guns, and provisions to last a fortnight. It was also pointed out to me that the rains might break at any minute and this would mean our being stranded on the road or in the wilds for ten days or a fortnight. This had not occurred to me. I had not realized that rain could break the eternity of those blue skies, or dim the brilliance of that pitiless African sun, or interfere with the plans of the Duce. I visualized the thrill my friends would have at home when they opened their papers and read "Jungle Drama of Peer's Nephew," or "Journalist Devoured by Hyenas." Northcliffe House would at least be able to say that, although their Special Correspondent failed to find a war, he did, however, supply a news story nearly as good.

My spirits, however, dropped to zero. Not at the thought of the hyenas, but at the idea of spending another two, perhaps three, days at Mogadiscio. Those bells, I knew, would ring out with an added zest, and an unholy relish, in the knowledge that I was imprisoned and at their mercy for an indefinite period. Could nothing be done about it? Could I appeal to the Bishop, or at dead of night creep up the tower of the Cathedral and cut the ropes? Even as these impious designs were passing through my mind, one of our friends from the *Brenta* called at the hotel to tell me that he was going to tea with the Bishop, and if I would like to come too I would find him a very interesting personality. I gladly accepted. We walked across to the palace, a Moorish-looking building at the side of the Cathedral which looks as if it was added as an afterthought to account for part of the expenditure

of that half-million pounds. A friendly Franciscan showed us into a waiting-room. It was decorated in the style of the Pompeii frescoes, which presented an incongruous effect in this setting. Mussolini and Vittore Emmanuel occupied the usual places of honour, and sandwiched between the two was a garishly coloured oleograph of the Sacred Heart. We waited half an hour, and then the Franciscan returned to say that the Bishop had been detained and would not be back in time to receive us. His diocese, we were told, was the largest in area and the smallest in population in Africa. He had, therefore, immense distances to travel to see his flock. I didn't mind that, but I regretted deeply that I wouldn't be able to tell His Grace what I thought about his bells.

Two days after my audience with General Graziani, the Mogadiscio paper, which appeared just as often or otherwise as the proprietor and editor thought fit, came out with a notice in heavy black type at the foot of which I saw the words, "By order of His Excellency the Governor." Translated, it read :

"Stern measures will be taken by the Government if it is found that any letters are being sent to newspapers or journalists in Italy, or any other country, describing conditions or activities in the Colony. This order applies to all, whether they be Italian subjects or otherwise."

It applied, in fact, to one person in particular, and that person was ME. As it happened, I had already written an account of my first impressions of Mogadiscio, but I had delayed posting it till I had found out what possibilities there were of its reaching Northcliffe House intact. Quite obviously it could not be entrusted to the tender mercies of the censor, although there was no question of my giving away military or political secrets.

At the same time, something had to be done soon, as at any moment telegrams would be arriving from the office asking for news and demanding what I was doing.

I appealed, as usual, to my long-suffering friend Captain Biroli. We worded a telegram in which I stated that I was unable to send cables containing "military or political information". This was taken to the Governor's secretary. It was brought back by Biroli with the secretary's request that I should insert the words "warmly received by General Graziani". To this I readily agreed, but I hardly saw what difference it made. A second time Captain Biroli returned, this time with the secretary's request that I should delete the words "unable send military or political information". To this I protested strongly, pointing out that the office would think I had gone completely mad if, instead of sending the expected and eagerly awaited cable describing scenes at Mogadiscio, I not only failed to send an explanation for *not* doing so but merely sent word that I had been "warmly received by General Graziani".

The secretary was adamant. Poor Captain Biroli perspired in bucketfuls. Each time he returned to the Croce del Sud I produced a new supply of handkerchiefs (as there were no buckets) for him. Finally an appeal was made to H. E. himself. No; emphatically *no*, came the reply, the message must *not* contain the words "unable send military or political information". The only course left for me was to send no telegram at all and to rely on the office to wait patiently a little longer. If I had sent the code message to London, suspicion would certainly have been aroused and the consequences perhaps unfortunate for me, so I decided to wait. Meantime I had received no reply to my request for further funds and my financial position was becoming critical. When I asked people how long it took to get

a reply to a telegram to England, they told me I might have to wait a week. Official messages, quite naturally, had to come first, and the Mogadiscio wireless station had more than enough to cope with as it was.

Things were looking their blackest. It was getting steadily hotter every day. I was living on credit. I had exhausted every form of entertainment and interest that Mogadiscio had to offer. I had succeeded, with immense effort and fortitude, in translating one chapter of General Graziani's book about Cirenaica. There were no English or French books to read. I had almost forgotten what a European newspaper looked like. The only "news" available was that contained in the local paper, which invariably informed us of some new frontier incident in which, as usual, the Abyssinians were the aggressors. The one thing left to do, while I was waiting for the interpreter, the lorry, the native driver, the camping equipment, and my money, was to sit outside the Croce del Sud, gulp down iced coffees, and watch the cavalcade of ants on the pavement bearing off corpses of flies to their secret storehouses high up in the crevices of the walls. All day and all night they laboured, storing up their supplies in readiness for the rainy season. It was a fascinating sight. A fly would collapse from sheer *malaise* on the hot pavement and instantly it would be surrounded by a dozen eager ants which seized the struggling monster and by a process of tugging, heaving and pushing bore it off with incredible speed along the route of death where returning ants hurried in search of further prey. It made one think of the slave raiders bound on their terrible journey which few of their victims ever survived.

At last, when I had lost all count of days, my money arrived from Northcliffe House. It had taken nearly a week in coming. The prospect of seeing an English five-pound note again was almost too much for me in the

mental condition to which I was reduced after a week of Mogadiscio. Perhaps the manager of the Banco d'Italia had anticipated this, for after an interminable wait in his office he informed me that he was going to pay me in lire, mentioning at the same time that it was illegal to take lire out of the country. As my money might have to last me a month and I hoped to leave Italian Somaliland in a week's time, I politely inquired whether I might be paid in sterling. This request was gently but firmly declined. There was no sterling in Mogadiscio.

Again I had to appeal to poor Biroli. We hurried round to the Government offices and saw the Financial Secretary. He had a long telephone conversation with the bank manager. Things began to move. Half my money was to be paid in sterling, the other half would be paid by cheque on a London bank. It seemed a fairly satisfactory compromise and I returned to the bank in higher spirits. But they soon collapsed again to zero. If I wished to be paid in sterling it would cost me sixty-one lire to buy £1, and as Northcliffe House had had to pay £1 for fifty-seven lire I stood to lose about £14 on the deal. There was nothing left but to accept the whole amount in lire and to conceal it in my cases before I left Mogadiscio. If it was discovered the money would be confiscated and I myself would have to accept the consequences. I decided to risk that. At worst it would be only another interesting specimen for my Anthology of Disagreeable Experiences of a Special Correspondent.

After the excitement about the money, life settled down once more to its usual calm. I watched the ants and the flies, and the young Italian Air Force bloods being gallant towards the Colonel's wife. I very nearly got drunk on iced coffee. I ventured once or twice in the direction of the native quarter but every time I



looked at a Somali girl she covered her face or rushed into the nearest *tukal*. I began to wonder whether I looked as mad as I felt. I wrote my second impression of Mogadiscio and wondered how I could get my first dispatch safely out of the country, and how long it would be before a search party was sent out for me from Northcliffe House.

Early one morning a tiny ray of hope appeared in the shape of a speck in the sky above the southern horizon. It drew nearer and a keen observer might have made out the graceful form of a Leopard Moth. Having grown accustomed to the roar of aeroplane engines overhead by day and night I took no particular notice of a strange engine note instead of the usual thunder of a triple-engined bomber. Half an hour later two Englishmen arrived at the Croce del Sud carrying small suitcases. The sound of an English voice had such an intoxicating effect upon me that I immediately forgot about the ants and the iced coffee and the Colonel's wife, and went up to the two Englishmen and introduced myself. They were apparently quite accustomed to this kind of behaviour and listened attentively and sympathetically to my long tale of woe. They had arrived, they told me, from Kenya and had business with the Italian Government. I never learned exactly what that business was, but I concluded that we were faced with a new "shortage" of some kind.

Two days later the Leopard Moth was on its way back to Nairobi. Amongst the baggage was a large sealed envelope addressed to the *Daily Mail*, London. And when it landed in Kenya, twelve hours later, a large lorry, carrying myself, Evans, Lieutenant Carlo di Mottola, a native driver and a native servant, guns, tents, camp-beds, mosquito nets and provisions for a fortnight, was trundling heavily out of Mogadiscio on its way south.

## CHAPTER X

### ELEPHANTS DON'T CARE

THERE are several generally accepted ways in which a big-game hunting expedition can be described. It depends, naturally, on whether the writer is a journalist, a big-game hunter, or merely a notoriety seeker. It depends on many other things as well, which I need not enter into here. I shall endeavour to describe my own experience as any fairly truthful journalist would. Had I been a big-game hunter, by hobby or by profession, I should probably have started my account something like this :

We took with us a 500-577 D.B. Express, a .416 Rigby, and an old .303 which had seen service in the Boer War. The latter, used with solid bullets (the points were notched), proved invaluable in all my encounters with lions. I shall always remember my 151st lion. We had trudged about fifteen miles (no sportsman worthy of the name would think of using any other means than his own heel and toe for tracking game) and it looked as if we had drawn a blank that day, when suddenly one of our two trackers who was a few paces ahead of me pulled up short and pointed excitedly to a clump of thick bushes only ten yards away. At first I could see nothing unusual. The next second a superb lioness, grunting furiously, leapt out of the undergrowth and charged us. It was a moment for quick thinking. Retreat was out of the question. A lioness, especially when she is angry, is always more dangerous than the male. The secret of shooting a lion is to keep perfectly still. Before I had hardly had time to get my .303 into

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position the lioness was only a few feet away. My two boys had taken to their heels. I knew my only hope was to stand my ground. I could almost feel the hot breath of the enraged beast on my face when I pressed the trigger. The noble creature reared, turned one last dying look of hatred upon me, and then rolled over at my feet—dead.

On re-reading the above I am not sure that I shouldn't have started with three or four pages describing the equipment one should take on a big-game hunting expedition, viz. :

Although it is a matter for the individual purse, big-game hunting to-day, in Africa or India, costs anything up to £500 a month. Let this not deter the would-be adventurer, however, for it can, of course, be done for considerably less, say £25 a month, provided, of course, that the hunter is prepared to sacrifice such needless little luxuries as a tent, bedding, servants and ground-sheets and, for that matter, guns as well. The two essentials that must never be left behind, however, are darning wool and a bottle of cascara . . . etc., etc.

This should have been followed by a few notes by an Old Hand on the smaller and lesser-known points of big-game hunting, viz. :

When tracking giraffe always take a small packet of acid drops with you. A giraffe cannot resist the scent of acid drops. Or, never fire at a charging rhinoceros until it is within at least 500 yards of your gun. Old man rhino has a tough hide (and nasty habits) and nothing short of a 15-inch shell fired at ten yards range will pull him up. A small .256 will, however, prove just as effective at times, although it is advisable not to depend upon this.

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There is another, and to my mind, a much more exciting way in which a big-game hunt can be carried out. This is to become friendly with an Indian potentate who, at vast expense, and with full Oriental ceremonial, will drive you into the heart of the jungle in his camouflaged Rolls-Royce (fitted with a gold wireless set and an inlaid mother-of-pearl cocktail cabinet), where a fleet of State elephants, painted white, with jewelled trappings, will convey you and your party to the scene of action. There an overfed and slightly doped tiger will be led into the circle of bored and blasé elephants by native beaters in scarlet and gold uniforms. If you fail to hit your quarry with your first shot, you are bound to succeed with your second or your third because the tiger will very obligingly remain in the same attitude for several more minutes. Afterwards, you and your party, having posed in the approved big-game manner for the *Tatler* photographer, will then withdraw for caviare sandwiches and champagne from your Fortnum & Mason hamper before proceeding to another part of the jungle for the afternoon's sport. . . .

My own big-game experience, I fear, comes under none of these picturesque headings. It happened in quite a simple way. When we eventually shook the dust of Mogadiscio from our shoes (to the accompaniment of huge sighs of relief from Captain Biroli as well as ourselves), we headed southwards along the coast road to Merca. I use the word "road" a little hesitatingly because, strictly speaking, no road (as recently as June of this year), in the European sense of the word, exists in Italian Somaliland outside of Mogadiscio. For that reason it was essential to undertake our long trek into the interior by lorry and not by car. In any case one car would not have sufficed for our party, in addition to the equipment necessary for a probable

enforced stop (on account of the rains) of two weeks by the roadside. Lieutenant di Mottola, who had been reluctantly spared by his General, proved, during the next fortnight, as helpful, congenial and long-suffering a companion as Captain Biroli. He had been called up under the 1911 class and when he received Mussolini's summons was skiing at Kitzbuhl. Like every other Italian I met and talked with, he had gladly and unquestioningly responded to Il Duce's call. (It would have been foolish to have done otherwise.) The idea of escaping from Mogadiscio for a few days evidently appealed to him strongly, not only because of Mogadiscio *malaise*, but as a means of seeing something of the colony itself. He had volunteered, in the event of hostilities, to accompany the native troops at the front. The native divisions, I gathered, were to lead the advance under white officers, and the rear and flanks were to be made up of white divisions. Di Mottola, however, knew little more than I did about what was in the minds of Mussolini and General Graziani and was prepared to do what he was told quietly and with unswerving faith in Fascist ideals. It was interesting to note this because Di Mottola comes of an old and illustrious family with great lands and possessions. His attitude towards the regime was very different from that of young men of similar position with whom I have talked in Germany.

Our driver was an Arab, an immense fellow with the disposition of a lamb (and a first-class driver at that), and our one native servant, a dreamy Somali, with an astonishing capacity for hard work and chewing gum. I tremble to think what kind of a trip we would have had without their aid and support. Our equipment and stores consisted of three camp beds and mosquito nets, three small tents, buckets, ground sheets, kettle, saucepan, frying pan, tinned salmon, distilled

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water, biscuits, chocolate, two flagons of chianti, a bottle of White Horse whisky and a small shot gun. There were a good many smaller items besides, all of which filled every available cubic foot of a large army lorry.

The road to Merca runs parallel to the coast and a few miles inland, but with the exception of the aerodrome just outside Mogadiscio (where I counted twenty three-engined bombers lined up), there was nothing of note to break the monotony of a six hours' journey during which we were jolted, jerked, bumped, rocked, pitched, tossed and shaken until we felt we had developed floating kidneys, housemaid's elbow, shingles and St. Vitus's Dance all at once. That first day it was a novelty. It was all very well for a few hours—but for a week, travelling twelve hours and sometimes more a day, it came near to martyrdom. We passed several new encampments where Italian soldiers stripped to the waist were building huts and stores and looking maddeningly cheerful in spite of the fierce heat. The scenery was flat, scrubby and uninteresting, the soil soft and sandy. If this low, unhealthy coastal area, bordering on the Equator, was any sample of Italian Somaliland as a whole it made one understand why the Italians had for so long gazed with envy at the cool, temperate heights of Abyssinia.

The tiny port of Merca was *en fête* when we arrived there. General Graziani was expected on his first visit the next morning and there was to be a review of troops. The Italian flag hung from every window. Italian soldiers still stripped to the waist and still looking maddeningly cheerful crowded the one street and the little piazza, and made eyes at the pretty Somali girls. The white stucco houses looked as neat and tidy as new pins. Swaying palm trees completed the musical comedy effect. Two old banana boats lay at anchor in

a sea of glass. The architecture of Merca is definitely Arabian, like all the towns along this coast which were under Arab domination for hundreds of years. It is not until one gets into the interior of Italian Somaliland that one sees the native Somali type of architecture, although architecture is rather a big word to use for *tukals* and huts made of old kerosene tins and cow-dung.

Our first concern was to find beds. We were met with the usual story at the one and only hotel that there was not a bed in the place and that every chair in the dining-room was in use all night. But Lieutenant Di Mottola had a way with him which suggested authority, and at the mention of the name Graziani the proprietor's attitude quickly changed. By the way he looked at Evans and myself, rubbing his hands together and bowing nearly to the ground, I gathered that Di Mottola had indicated that we were persons of considerable importance, although our appearance was not particularly prepossessing after our six hours' lorry drive. We were shown up to an indescribably dirty bedroom with three beds. There was every indication that the last occupants had only just vacated the room. Some of their friends had remained for the night. It was this or sleeping on the beach, and I am not sure that it would not have been more sanitary if we had chosen the latter.

At five o'clock the next morning we set off on the next stage of our journey down the coast to Brava. The road runs inland and we decided to make a slight detour so as to include a visit to the lonely outpost of Awai where we were told we might see elephant. The country was as inhospitable as ever, and the scrub grew denser and the roads became mere tracks through the undergrowth as we penetrated farther inland. The only sign of humanity was an occasional wanderer striding arrogantly along the highway under

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an umbrella. The effect was ludicrous, but the Somalis love umbrellas. Those who couldn't rise to an umbrella carried a spear, a wise precaution as we were now in the country of the leopard and the hyena. A warm welcome, in every sense of the word, awaited us at Awai. It was, I think, the hottest place we discovered in the whole of our wanderings, and I always regret that I didn't look at the thermometer to see what the temperature actually was. A damp, sickening humidity hinted at all manner of dread tropical fevers: malaria, dysentery, scurvy and diphtheria. And the fierceness of the sun's rays surpassed anything I had experienced in any other part of the world.

The house to which we were conducted, a rambling two-storied wooden affair with a balcony running all round and a corrugated iron roof, reminded me of the homesteads in the Australian backblocks. The place was in some confusion because the owner had died a week before and the Commissioner of Brava had come over to wind up the estate. This consisted of a large banana plantation and a few acres of maize, which supported a small community of Somalis and provided a hunting box for big-game enthusiasts who come to Awai from Mogadiscio, and sometimes from Italy. A year or two before King Vittore Emmanuel had planned to come here and a special road had been built from Awai to a spot, some ten miles away, much frequented by elephant. The authorities had not been able to control the rains and the Royal visit had to be abandoned. If we had waited another two weeks it would have been impossible for us to reach Awai.

At lunch the entire European colony, consisting of three wireless operators, and two overseers of the banana farm, forgathered at the homestead. In addition to Di Mottola, Evans and myself, there was



the Commissioner of Brava and an Italian Marchese, whose name I could not catch. The latter had a farm twenty miles away where he spends six months of the year, while the rest of the year he spends in Italy. He had, I was told later, a considerable reputation as a big-game hunter and had shot an elephant near Awai the day before our arrival. Over lunch we discussed the prospects of seeing elephant, and the Marchese offered to take us to a spot ten miles away where he was certain we would see most kinds of game, including elephant. I eagerly fell in with this excellent proposal although it would slightly interfere with the itinerary arranged and signed by H. E. (a fact which rather disturbed our conscientious friend Di Mottola). After lunch we completed our preparations, and, with the addition of four native trackers, who, with the Marchese, swelled our number to ten, set off in the lorry along the track which had been prepared for the King of Italy. It was the first time that an army lorry had penetrated those wild regions, and this was emphasized by the fact that after we had proceeded two miles an overhanging branch almost demolished the upper framework of the lorry as well as partially stunning one of the native boys squatting on our baggage. The track twisted its way like a coiling snake through the dense scrub, and progress at more than ten miles an hour was impossible. The roar of our engine at this low speed must have struck terror into the heart of every wild animal for miles, for with the exception of foxes and dik-dik we saw no game at all. Nevertheless the track bore unmistakable evidence of the recent presence of elephant. There were birds in plenty, of all sizes and colours, and some would utter startled screams at our approach and hurry off to warn the sleeping jungle that their arch-enemy, man, was coming to disturb their peace.

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We had covered a little over ten miles in this way when the scrub suddenly ended and we found ourselves in a natural open clearing at the side of a lake. I shall always remember that spot, not because of the events associated with it, but, for sheer wildness and remoteness, it surpassed anything I had pictured. The lake was dense with water lilies, of great size and magnificence, and a heavy stillness hung over everything. Even in the full glare of the afternoon sun it was a little terrifying, a little sinister. But I think it was the entire absence of sound that impressed me more than anything. There was no sign of life although one knew that within a square mile of where we were standing animal life was teeming in millions, in the water and in the thick scrub, and in every conceivable form. Our scent was being picked up by a thousand pairs of sensitive nostrils, every small sound we made was being registered in the delicate mechanism of millions of ears, and we were being watched by countless pairs of unseen eyes. Watching, listening, smelling.

We decided to pitch camp for the night at the side of the lake and our host suggested that we might cross to the other side to see the elephant he had shot the day before. This necessitated two journeys in a native canoe crudely carved out of a tree trunk, the first party consisting of the Marchese and Di Mottola and one of the native trackers, the latter returning to take Evans and myself. With three people in the canoe the water was only two or three inches below the side and any movement on our part would have overturned us all. Progress was made additionally slow by the dense growth of water lilies which rightly resented our rude encroachment. Suddenly our native boy lifted the canoe pole high out of the water and cried : "*Sug ! Sug !*" As he did so I saw, with horror, a long and ominous shape glide stealthily across our bows

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and for one second I was not sure whether it was a hippopotamus or a crocodile. No part of the animal's body was showing above the surface of the water. Our boy, with the promptness of one who knows that to linger is fatal, worked with feverish haste to reverse the canoe to safety. Meantime the shape, to our intense relief, made off across the lake, but before it disappeared from view raised its head a few inches above the water, enough for us to distinguish two enormous eyes and a row of cruel teeth. It was an immense crocodile.

We decided that the sooner we got to the bank the better, and accordingly abandoned the idea of meeting the rest of the party at the spot where they had disembarked farther down the lake. This was not so easily accomplished, because the banks of the lake were protected by an almost impenetrable wall of rushes fifteen feet tall with sword-like edges. With many marks of battle on our arms and legs we struggled to the bank and began our long and difficult trek to where Di Mottola and our host were waiting for us. The fact that our only form of protection consisted of a spear carried by our boy disturbed us very little at the time, although I have often wondered since what would have happened had we met a tiger or a leopard. I doubt very much whether I would have been able to comfort myself with the nice theory (however true it may be) that even a lion is much more afraid of you than you of him, and that almost every animal will make for safety on the approach of man. But supposing that the lion or tiger or leopard decides that attack is the best method of defence?

I won't attempt to describe our long and weary trudge to the scene of the dead elephant. Only those who have experienced hours of walking and tracking under the sweltering African sun could appreciate its

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grimness. I pined for the camouflaged Rolls-Royce and the Fortnum & Mason hamper. It took us nearly an hour to rejoin the rest of the party who by now were becoming alarmed at the long delay. Progress through the long grass was made all the slower owing to the enormous footprints of elephant, caked hard in the mud and in some cases nearly a foot deep and eighteen inches in diameter. Sometimes, too, we came across huge indentations where an elephant had disported itself in the mud. A thing that struck me rather forcibly was the ease and speed with which our boy covered the difficult ground. We appeared to be walking fast ourselves but the native was always some distance ahead and repeatedly had to wait for us to catch up.

I was beginning to regret having fallen in with our host's suggestion to visit the dead elephant, when an overpowering smell denoted that the carcass was not very far distant. Actually we still had several hundred yards to walk. An astonishing sight greeted us when we came upon the scene of death. The great hulk lay on its side with its legs standing stiffly out from the body. The sun had caused the body to swell to almost twice its normal size and the whole effect reminded me of one of those enormous toy elephants at Christmas bazaars. It only required wheels on the feet to complete the illusion. But the most surprising thing was the vast number of flies which almost concealed the hide. From a distance of a few yards it sounded as if a great air armada was approaching from Awai. The trunk and tusks had been sawn off already by the natives, as well as the pads of the feet. In a day or two the process of decomposition would be completed by the birds, some of which, mainly vultures, already waited philosophically on nearby trees for the carcass to burst.

I was thankful to get back to the camp that evening,

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hot, hungry and exhausted, and in no mood for further adventures in search of elephants, dead or alive. Abdul, our Arab driver, had prepared an excellent meal for us, and with the cool breezes that sprang up after the sun had finally disappeared below the horizon our waning enthusiasms revived. The native boys, all of whom were experienced trackers, were to set off about midnight and report any signs of elephant within easy reach of the camp. At eleven we crawled under our mosquito nets and settled down hopefully to sleep.

I remarked earlier in this chapter that there was something a little terrifying, a little sinister, about that remote spot we had chosen for our camp. By day there was an eerie stillness, a pall of silence over everything. I had not stopped to think in those first vivid moments how the hand of night might transform that scene into something infinitely more terrifying, incomparably more sinister. That sense of hidden things watching, listening, smelling, had now grown acutely real, and the African night, lit by a languid and sensuous moon, had become a great mosaic of sound. The breeze had almost dropped and with it a swarm of mosquitoes (which we were told afterwards were of the most dangerous malarious nature) descended upon our nets with a great battle cry of beating wings and flourishing swords. Their hideous drone shut out all thought of sleep or elephants. Fortunately our nets were able to withstand the attack, but the mosquitoes knew that if they waited long enough those foolish-looking meat covers would be removed from our beds and a glorious feast would then await them.

Gradually we became accustomed to the high-pitched drone of the mosquitoes and then other noises became distinguishable. From the lake arose a weird chorus of chattering teeth and jaws, a noise that one can only liken to cup-final enthusiasts with wooden

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clappers on their way to Wembley. It was the courting song of the crocodile. If one tried to approach the spot from where the sound came it would dramatically cease, like a cricket, but one knew that somewhere near, with no part of its body showing, a hungry crocodile was lurking beneath the water, and if one waited that crocodile would glide silently towards one, still under water, and make a sudden rush attack.

The crocodile chorus drowned, for a time, the insistent drone of the mosquitoes. But only for a time. Another and far greater voice was suddenly added to the midnight orchestra, a deep bass note, which danced and echoed along the lake like the laughter of a giant. There was anger and defiance in that laughter too. A hippopotamus, not fifty yards from our camp, had either been disturbed or was meditating a raid on our tents.

I was anxious to get a close view of the hippo and was crawling out of my net to consult the Marchese when our boys returned and in excited whispers announced that elephant were near. Without a second's delay the four of us set off, close on the heels of the natives. Our host had taken an Express 6.2 rifle, but with the exception of Di Mottola's small shot gun the rest of us were unarmed. We had proceeded about five hundred yards in silence when our leader signalled for us to drop to the ground. We were still in the clearing around the lake and only about twenty-five yards from the water. The moon was rising slowly but the light was insufficient as yet to distinguish objects more than twenty yards away.

We lay prone for minutes that seemed an eternity and I wondered just then why I had been so exceedingly indiscreet as to wear white shorts on an expedition like this. An elephant, even if he had got bad sight, would surely be able to pick me out a mile away. This

disquieting thought was magnified a hundredfold when out of the blackness, not twenty paces ahead of us, there loomed a massive form which filled the entire skyline. It was moving very slowly towards us, pawing heavily at the ground, and at the same time emitting strange rumbling sounds which, I was to learn, are the elephant's way of expressing a contented digestion.

The first time you are confronted with an elephant at close quarters at midnight *and you haven't a gun* is an experience that you are not likely to forget. That elephant seems at least three times life size. It would be very easy for me to dramatize those tremendous few minutes, but it would spoil the effect. It would be absurd to pretend that one had, just then, no sense of physical fear. If the elephant did see us, or pick up our scent, what would it do? And what could *we* do? The finest shot in the world would not have risked firing at an elephant at close quarters in almost pitch darkness. We were a quarter of a mile from the camp. The only cover, if one could call it that, was a clump of scrub and small trees which an elephant could trample through like grass. Our host did the only thing possible under the circumstances. He signalled for us to make for cover, crouching and a few paces at a time, so that our movements would not excite the animal's attention. We had hardly begun our retreat before the elephant's rumblings abruptly ceased. At the same time the heavy pawing also stopped. The ensuing silence was like the calm before a cyclone. We waited, seconds that seemed like hours, minutes like an eternity. Whether we had been seen, or merely suspected, I don't know, but the elephant apparently decided to wait to make quite sure. And then the rumblings renewed, which was the signal for us to continue our retreat as quickly and as stealthily as possible before our presence was finally established. When the

## ELEPHANTS DON'T CARE

pawing recommenced too, we knew that the worst was passed and we made hurriedly back to camp.

I had almost forgotten to mention that from the moment we crawled out of our nets until, twenty minutes later, we crawled into bed again, we were violently attacked by the waiting swarms of mosquitoes. At the time one was not conscious of anything but the immediate danger in hand, but for weeks later one bore scars to recall that momentous night. According to all the rules I should have brought home with me a more lasting memento in the form of repeated outbreaks of malaria. Perhaps I was spared that because of the billion billion germs I had pumped into me before I left England.

There was not much sleep for us that night. We heard the heavy pawing movements of the elephant grow nearer and then abruptly cease. He had decided to have a bath. This intrusion on the domains of another monster greatly enraged the hippopotamus, whose satanic laughter now contained a threatening note, although making no attempt to approach the object of his fury. For nearly an hour the elephant splashed and rolled and frolicked in the mud, heedless of the hippo, and spraying himself unconcernedly with his trunk. When the splashing ceased we wondered whether he would come and pay us a visit. Apparently he decided otherwise, for, under the bright light of the moon, we saw him moving quickly and stealthily from the water's edge, pause for one second, as if listening, and then hurry into the scrub. As he disappeared from view we caught a fleeting glimpse of a huge cat-like creature emerging from the scrub at the elephant's approach and then quickly disappearing again.

The thing that impressed me more than anything about the elephant was the quietness of its movements



and the speed and agility with which it covered the ground. It made even the tiger look clumsy.

It was now nearly 3 a.m., and we all felt that we had had enough excitement for one night. And so, as each tiny jewelled light of the fireflies was extinguished and the first pale streaks of dawn appeared, bringing a hush to that strange orchestra (and a merciful armistice with the mosquitoes), I began counting elephants going through a gate and fell off to sleep.

## CHAPTER XI

### LOVE, LEPERS AND LONELINESS

WE struck camp at ten o'clock that morning and, having taken our host back to Awai, continued on our way to Brava where we had been invited to break our journey to have lunch with the Commissioner. Brava was the chief port of this stretch of coast before the Italians developed Mogadiscio and is even more Arabian in architecture and atmosphere than Merca. A strange race of people live here who are partly of Arabic and partly of Somali descent. They are an artistic people and I regretted that I couldn't bring away one of their beautiful carved doorways. I bargained with the merchants who sold leopard skins but I found that the prices are fixed by the Government and these, too, are immovable. In any case my luggage had already assumed absurd proportions and I was hoping to make some interesting additions in Abyssinia.

The Commissioner of Brava lives in a house like a Sultan's palace and in spite of his lonely life evidently preferred the almost royal authority he enjoys for a wide area around to a humdrum Civil Service job at home. There was something in his manner and appearance, too, which suggested a minor Eastern potentate, accentuated as it was by the longest fingernails I have ever seen, on any man or woman, not excepting the Chinese. They were pointed and extended to fully an inch beyond the tips of his fingers. His duties occasionally took him as far as Mogadiscio and once in five years he could go home to Italy. He

informed us, however, that he was very busy and only that morning had received over a dozen telegrams from Mogadiscio. He didn't disclose what kind of business these telegrams contained, but as there were no signs of military activity at Brava I concluded that they could not be of a very pressing nature. The quiet life undoubtedly appealed to him. There were only half a dozen other Europeans in the place. His wife, a very charming woman many years younger than her husband, gave the impression that she would prefer living in a little suburban house at home with one servant, to existing so far away from civilization in a magnificent house with a dozen servants and a crested dinner service. Her time, however, was fully occupied with bringing up three young children and I noticed that these children had a dark tint about their skin, like so many children born in the tropics.

The dinner service at lunch bore the Royal monogram (the forks were aluminium) and we sampled the local oysters. They were about a quarter of the size of an English oyster and practically tasteless. The only ground on which they could be excused was the fact that there was not an R in the month. In every other respect the lunch was excellent, even if, towards coffee, the conversation drifted into rather dangerous channels. We discussed Dictators and Fascism and Monarchies. Di Mottola maintained that England would soon have a Blackshirt Dictator and that we would be all the better for that. I replied that if there was a television installation at Brava he would be able to witness one of the most extraordinary Royalist demonstrations in history going on in London at that very minute. This, I added, was no mere blind adoration of Royalty for Royalty's sake but a very real expression of gratitude and devotion to our King and Queen for their immeasurable services to the

British Empire. A certain type of Italian mind is entirely unable to grasp this fact although, apparently, it is prepared to elevate one man, Mussolini, to the position almost of a Messiah.

As soon as Mussolini's name came into the conversation, I felt that it would be overstepping diplomatic etiquette to discuss so profound a subject within those walls and accordingly, at 3.30 p.m., we took leave of our host and hostess. We had a five hours' journey ahead of us to Jelib, on the Juba River, and we had been told that rain was already falling in the south. I am not going to dwell on the superb dreariness of that journey. There was one moment of excitement when we sighted a strange black-and-white creature in the scrub, about whose identity there was some doubt. Everybody had different ideas till we discovered, on approaching more closely, that we were looking at the hind quarters of an ostrich.

As we approached Jelib the eternal scrub and sand gave way to a more luxuriant soil and vegetation. The Juba River accounted for this. It flows down from the Abyssinian highlands and meets the Indian Ocean at Chisimaio. A few years ago we carved a piece off Kenya called Jubaland and presented it to Italy as a consolation for not receiving what she considered her just deserts at Versailles. The quality of the gift, however, is doubtful (although Kenya is still burdened with a debt incurred in defending Jubaland), because the River Juba has proved to be brackish as far as the Abyssinian boundary.

We drove straight to the Residency at Jelib, a small stone house with the usual balcony running all round. The Resident, a young man in the early thirties, suffering from chronic catarrh, received us warmly, and told us not to mind the insects. After five years, no doubt, he had got used to them. There

were moths, beetles, dragon-flies and earwigs of immense size. Unless they landed in the soup or crawled up your trousers you tried to take no notice of them. The Resident's life was a busy one here because he had to do everything single-handed from supervising road construction to settling cases of domestic incompatibility amongst the natives. As there were only two or three Europeans in the district (including a Swedish missionary), the life was a lonely one, but I gathered from photographs around the walls that the madame system was the order of the day here too.

After dinner we strolled through the native village (there are no European houses) and hearing the beating of a tom-tom we went to the market-place to see what was happening. At first, the complete darkness and the crush of people prevented us from getting a close view. Somebody produced a torch and flashed it in the centre of the crowd, which consisted of the lads and belles of the village of all ages from six to twenty-six. Two young men and a girl were dancing in the centre. It was a simple affair. The two young men faced the girl and the three shuffled backwards and forwards to the music of the tom-tom while the spectators clapped their hands. As the rhythm grew faster, the two young men clapped their hands and stamped their feet more vigorously, the girl swaying backwards and forwards, until the climax was reached and all three embraced. The dance had a definite sexual significance which would undoubtedly be out of place on a London stage, but in this setting amongst these child-like natives it seemed entirely natural and spontaneous. Every night they gathered round for these dances and the monotonous beating of the tom-tom was still going on long after midnight when I was struggling for sleep with a mattress and pillow as hard as boards.

Early the next morning the Italian doctor in charge of the Vittore Bianci Leper Colony came round to see us. He is a young man who has studied at Charing Cross Hospital and has now dedicated his life to alleviating the suffering of these poor human derelicts. He asked if I would like to see round the colony, a suggestion with which I readily agreed. The Colony is situated on an island in the Juba River, and I was surprised to find that the part occupied by the lepers is not in any way isolated from the rest of the community and it would be easy therefore for any of the inmates to get away. The fact that none had been known to do so spoke for itself. There are some 250 cases in the Colony, men, women and children, and those who are able to do so work in the maize fields. The Government buys the maize and gives it back to the Colony.

I had brought my camera with me but I decided that it would be kinder to leave it in the car. We found a number of the lepers, wearing white *chammas*, standing about in groups under the trees. As soon as the doctor came into sight they ran up to him like excited children. I was a little apprehensive of what we might see as they approached, but at first there was nothing unusual in their appearance. But then one noticed that some of them hung back and cringed behind the others. The doctor called one out by name. There was no response. The doctor called out again, mentioning that he had a cigarette for him. A score of eager faces turned in the direction of a man who was shyly and timidly making his way to the front. His face was terrible and, poor wretch, he knew it. He could not have been above twenty, but the ravages of leprosy had changed his face into a grim mockery, a hideous gargoyle. With downcast eyes he approached the doctor, turning nervously to note the solemn expressions of the audience. The doctor asked him to smile. The poor

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wretch fumbled with his hands and hung his head. Again the doctor asked him to smile, coaxing him like a sulky child. Slowly he raised his head and there gradually crept across his tortured features the semblance of a smile. The doctor gave him the cigarette, taking care that their fingers did not touch.

I was thankful that I hadn't brought my camera. It would have been unpardonably cruel. Those of these poor people who had, so far, been spared the more dreaded scars, visible on face and hands and feet, looked searchingly at each other, as though waiting for the day when they, too, would be marked and branded like the others. The doctor asked me if I had had enough or whether I would care to see some of the more serious cases. Just at that moment two men carrying a woman on a stretcher joined the group. They placed the stretcher down in front of us. The wretched woman immediately started chattering and waving her arms at the doctor. The other lepers gathered round. There was no need to offer the woman a cigarette. She had no hands or feet. Only the withered and twisted stumps of what once were wrists and ankles were left. Her only means of getting about was on this stretcher, carried by two other lepers in return for food which she gave them.

At the back of the group I noticed a woman carrying a baby and I asked the doctor how it came to be here. The mother and father, it appeared, were both lepers but the baby so far was immune from the disease. The parents clung to the child with something akin to terror in their eyes, as if we had come to take it away from them. The doctor speedily reassured them. He told me that nobody could say whether the child would inherit the terrible taints of the mother and father. Even if it was mercifully spared that sad fate, the thought of this child growing up and seeing from day

to day these ghastly travesties of human faces and bodies was almost too terrible to contemplate. The doctor would be one of the few normal-looking human beings that child would ever see.

As we were leaving we passed a man whose head was entirely concealed by a cotton shawl. He was being led by another leper. I inquired why his head was covered. The doctor said he was one of the more serious cases and it might not be advisable for me to see his face. I assured him that it wouldn't upset me, providing that it did not distress the man himself to expose his head. The doctor called out and the leper raised the shawl. There was no face at all. What we saw was little more than a skull, thinly covered with a slimy substance that once was flesh. The nose and ears and eyes and hair had been eaten completely away. It required a certain amount of self-control to look upon this poor stricken creature and not to recoil with horror. He could hear and speak but could not see. The doctor told him to cover himself again and he was led away by his companion. This companion was always with him, fed him, dressed him, attended to all his needs, and in return was given a share of the other's food. Like the other lepers they lived in a *tukal*.

The founder of the colony, Vittore Bianci, after having devoted many years of his life to alleviating the sufferings of the lepers, contracted the disease and shot himself. The lepers have built a memorial to him with their own hands in the grounds of the colony.

Before leaving Jelib for Bardera the Resident took us through the primeval forest in the direction of Alessandra. It was a sickening experience. We journeyed about ten miles, at a speed rarely more than ten miles an hour, and during the whole of that time we were at the mercy of the tsetse-fly. They stung with the fierceness of wasps and refused to be cheated of the



blood of an Englishman. The primeval forest was like all other primeval forests. Every few yards we had to remove broken branches and tangled undergrowth which impeded our progress, while baboons and birds of dazzling colours scattered in terror at our approach.

Our next stage was northwards to Bardera along the east bank of the Juba. We had abandoned the idea of crossing the equator to Chisimaio as threatening clouds were already beginning to appear from the south. In another few days the monsoon would break, and I was beginning to feel anxious about getting back to Mogadiscio. The road to Bardera was, if anything, worse than the others. It was little more than a dried-up water-course and in a week's time would become a raging torrent. The country, for the most part, was flat and featureless, but once we came across a clearing in the bush where an aerodrome was being built. There were thousands of ant-hills of fantastic shapes which reminded one of the fairy castles of Ludwig of Bavaria. Some of them were ten feet high and were honeycombed with holes made by lizards and birds in search of the food stored up by the ants. Occasionally a few natives would leave their herds of goats and camels to see what the commotion was about. Only once in a month or six weeks does a lorry penetrate into the territory of these remote people. There is a rest house surrounded by *tukals* between Jelib and Bardera where we stopped to cook a meal. The entire village gathered round and gazed at us, speechless with astonishment at the colour of our skins.

It was dark when we arrived at Bardera, very weary, very shaken (by this time I felt that every bone in my body was permanently dislocated), and longing for the luxuries of Mogadiscio. The Resident received us cordially, and was evidently delighted to have visitors

from the outside world. His life was a more lonely one than that of the Resident at Jelib. There were only three other Europeans in Bardera, a doctor and two wireless operators. The doctor's time was fairly fully occupied, but I never discovered how the wireless officers filled in their days. The main topic of conversation seemed to be rain. Nobody was worrying much about the Abyssinians, and at that particular moment we, too, were thinking more about rain than war. After dinner there were a few heavy drops, which was the signal for the doctor to explain with great relish that we would not be able to continue our journey for at least another two weeks. We decided to make an early start next morning, wet or fine, and went off to bed soon after dinner.

I was tired and fell off to sleep almost immediately. An hour or two later I was awakened by whispers which seemed to be in my room. I struck a match and went to the window and threw back the shutters. There I beheld two exquisite young Somali girls. They couldn't have been more than sixteen, and each was highly made up and wore quantities of gold ear-rings, bracelets and brooches. They were by far the best-looking Somali girls I had seen and in their brightly coloured silks reminded me of Cingalese girls. They looked at me and giggled. They continued to giggle and I suddenly remembered that I was completely naked. This oversight on my part was quickly remedied with the aid of a towel and I invited my lovely visitors to climb through the window. Once they were in the room I began to wonder what was going to happen next. Conversation, except in signs and delicate grimaces, was impossible. In any case I was frightened of disturbing our host. I poured out three tumblers of whisky and *aqua minerale*. At first the girls were a little suspicious of poison so I drank mine first to

show that I had no evil intentions. Thereupon they drank theirs down in one gulp and indicated that they would like some more. The situation was now becoming extremely awkward. I made signs with my hands and eyes to show that I was tired and wanted to go to sleep. But this was a fatal move. They interpreted my signs as meaning that I wanted them to sleep with me and put their theory into effect by throwing themselves on my bed. They then proceeded to undress. You may perhaps think that this little story should conclude as quickly as possible with a series of diplomatic dots. I was beginning to think so myself when another idea presented itself. I produced a 50-lire note and dropped it outside the window. The two girls immediately leapt off the bed, half undressed, and vaulted through the window like a pair of starving cats. This was followed by scuffling and hissing sounds outside which lasted for some minutes and I was afraid the whole of Bardera would hear it. I never heard who got the 50 lire but I fancy the note was torn to shreds.

At last I thought I would get a little sleep. I was dead tired and in no mood for entertaining dusky damsels to midnight parties in a house where I was the guest of the Italian Government. It might lead, I thought, to a fresh international "incident" if it reached the ears of the Propaganda Ministry. Or was it, perhaps, a thoughtful gesture on the part of my host and I had muddled the whole thing? While I was reflecting on this idea the whispering started afresh outside my window. I decided that my best plan was to ignore it. But the whispering grew in volume and presently I heard the shutters being pushed back. Something had to be done very quickly. I jumped out of bed (without the towel) and confronted the intruders just as two of them were clambering through the window. At first I thought I had only two to deal with. But apparently the story

of the 50-lire note had spread far beyond Bardera and I counted nearly a dozen girls besides the two climbing through the window. They were all very pretty and very young. It was a situation that called for very delicate handling. I dived into my pockets, and collecting a handful of coins threw them as far out of the window as possible. The fourteen pretty little Somali girls suddenly turned into fourteen frenzied wild beasts with fangs and claws and teeth. And while they fought and bit and scratched in a swirling mass of silks and bangles and bracelets in the moonlight, I climbed back under my mosquito net, but not before I had bolted my shutters against any further mass attack that night.

The next morning at breakfast my host surprised me by announcing that he had heard about the events of the night and that 50 lire was far too much to have given. If I had paid five lire it would have been ample. Even a "madame" did not get as much as fifty lire a month. The doctor, too, pointed out that nearly all the girls in the village, and for that matter in all Somaliland, were diseased. Nobody would believe me when I explained that we had only had a glass of whisky and *aqua minerale*, which was followed by a display of all-in wrestling outside my window.

Our original plan, as approved by General Graziani, was to continue north from Bardera along the Juba as far as Lugh, near the borders of Kenya and Abyssinia. Undoubtedly this would have been interesting as it would have given us an opportunity of seeing what preparations were being made on the frontier, although the fact that Lugh had been included in our itinerary suggested that nothing much was happening there. But any idea of going farther north was decided by the rain. There was a fairly heavy downpour after breakfast and we all agreed that the sooner we got to Ischia Baidoa, on the way back to Mogadiscio, the better. If we had

gone to Lugh it would have meant an extra two days, which, as things, turned out, would have been fatal. The journey to Iscia Baidoa, a distance of about 80 miles, was accomplished in record time, in spite of trench holes in the road which I thought would break our axle. We had collected another passenger at Bardera in the person of a young Arab boy who had recently lost his mother and father. Abdul, our driver, on hearing that he was an orphan, had immediately adopted him and was planning to teach him English and mechanical engineering. He was a good-hearted fellow, this Abdul, and a driver in whom one could place perfect confidence. Our journey through Italian Somaliland would have been very different, and much less endurable, without him.

Iscia Baidoa was bristling with activity and native troops when we arrived there late in the afternoon. The rain had kept off but the sky was looking decidedly threatening. We drove straight to the Residency, which is in the middle of a little European township, with a wireless station, a church and a number of neat white houses where the Government officials live. Outside this European compound the town resembled an armed camp. Native troops strutted proudly about the streets in their red fezes, khaki tunics and puttees (but no boots). They lived in camouflaged tents on the surrounding hills. Iscia Baidoa is nearly 2,000 feet up and it was the coolest spot we found in Italian Somaliland. The Italians were evidently concentrating a considerable force here (apart from a fairly large native garrison which is always kept there) which suggested that General Graziani planned to move towards Lugh and follow the valley of the Webbe Mana into the heart of Abyssinia towards Addis Ababa, while another force advanced simultaneously towards Harar along the Webbe Shibeli.



A leper woman at Jelib



The Juba River

The Residency was in a state of pandemonium when we arrived there. A number of officials had just arrived from Mogadiscio, as well as Madame de Bonneuil of *L'Illustration* who had dropped out of the clouds in an Italian military aeroplane that afternoon. We did not meet on this occasion, not in fact till we left Mogadiscio for home on the *Mazzini*. I asked her later how she managed to prevail on the authorities to (a) allow her to enter the country and (b) permit her to use a military aeroplane. She explained that she had arrived in Italian Somaliland before the embargo had been placed on Foreign Correspondents but she was forbidden to write about anything except the local flora and fauna. For this purpose the Italian authorities at Mogadiscio, with customary gallantry, had placed a car at her disposal and she had been touring the northern districts as far as Bender Cassim. There she developed a convenient fever and the Italians allowed her to continue her journey by air. She was a very charming and clever woman and I regretted that we had not met earlier in our adventurous wanderings.

If we had stayed at Ischia Baidoa it would have meant our camping in the grounds of the Residency, and there was to be a full-dress Fascist dinner that night. My full dress consisted of a very soiled pair of shorts and an open-neck shirt. It was beginning to rain again. Weighing all these considerations we decided that it would be best to continue to Mogadiscio. It was the wisest decision I have made in my life. Had we delayed another hour we would have been compelled to remain at Ischia Baidoa for a week. Abdul had already driven 80 miles in the morning, and 80 miles in Italian Somaliland at the wheel of an army lorry is equivalent to 300 miles of normal driving at home. But Abdul was as keen to get back to Mogadiscio as we were and soon after 3 o'clock we were on our way. An



hour later the storm broke. Within five minutes we were all soaked to the skin and the road was a river of mud and sand. We had another 80 miles to go. Abdul's expression became very grim but there was no suggestion of stopping or turning back. Where, at times, the road became impassable we made short detours through ploughed fields. At Bur Acaba, which rises like a Rock of Gibraltar from the plains, we came across a large detachment of the Autogruppo, with our old friend, Captain Biroli, drenched like ourselves but as cheerful as ever. The main force of the storm had spent itself and the rain now settled down to a steady drizzle till we reached Mogadiscio. It was then nearly midnight. Abdul said he didn't feel in the least tired. The rest of us felt like lying down there and then on the pavement outside the Croce del Sud.

As it happened Evans and I had to sleep in a small store-room leading out of the barber's shop. We slept so soundly that even the bells didn't disturb us, but at ten o'clock we woke up to find the barber walking about the room, evidently puzzled at beholding two dishevelled-looking Englishmen (with a week's growth of beard) sprawled out amongst his curling-tongs and cosmetics. We reassured him by becoming his first clients that morning, and after a bath and the usual iced coffee breakfast made our way to the office of H.E.'s secretary.

My idea was to avail myself at once of H.E.'s offer to use a military lorry and go due north to Berbera in British Somaliland. Our route would have taken us in the direction of Wal Wal and the journey would have been an interesting one, affording us a glimpse of British Somaliland too. I was anxious to get away as soon as possible, as the monsoon was due to break any day. I suggested that we should start next day and the service of Abdul be retained for the Berbera trip. Meantime

I would like to see H.E. to thank him for the courtesies extended by the Italian Government during my visit. H.E.'s secretary listened very attentively and told me that everything would be done for me as soon as possible. That "soon as possible" sounded ominous.

We waited one day, two days, three days. I only have a very bare recollection of how we spent that time. Everybody assured me that it would be madness to try and get to Berbera by road, that the rains had already started in the interior, that I was certain to get stranded and either starve to death or be devoured by hyenas. The alternative was to remain at Mogadiscio for an indefinite period and hope that a boat might appear from Mombasa. I naturally preferred the thought of being devoured by hyenas. One day a telegram arrived from Rome. It had taken ten days in coming. At the cinema we saw pictures of Prince George in South Africa, not very far away, but they were eighteen months old. Nothing hurried out here. Mogadiscio went on looking like the old White City by day and the second act of a pre-war musical comedy by night. Nobody mentioned the word war. The local paper continued to report fresh incidents on the frontier (manufactured in Rome). Fresh faces appeared in the dining-room of the Croce del Sud from time to time, Air Force officers who had flown from Eritrea, road builders in search of rich contracts, and a big-game-hunting lady, unmistakably stamped London, Paris and New York, who apparently found it unnecessary to venture beyond the confines of Mogadiscio for her prey. One day Madame de Bonneuil herself appeared in a superb Molyneux creation consisting of white shorts and a cricket shirt. Early the following morning the big-game-hunting lady left hurriedly for an unknown destination.

It was now nearly three months since I left home. My mission, to all intents and purposes, had been a

hopeless failure. Although Northcliffe House was prompt in replying to my requests for more money (and these requests were frequent enough) there was no indication that my messages were setting Fleet Street on fire. When I left London all eyes were on Mogadiscio. Troop ships were tumbling over one another in a mad race down the Red Sea. But unless I was mistaken they were not, as reported, heading for Somaliland. Their destination was Eritrea, from where the main offensive must certainly be launched. It was only by accident that I found myself at Massowah and found out what was happening there. Here at Mogadiscio there was nothing to see or write about at all. The whole situation in Italian Somaliland was controlled by the monsoon. Even Mussolini could not control the great invincible forces of nature.

Captain Biroli sympathized with me. Lieutenant Di Mottola sympathized with me. Abdul sympathized with me. So did the proprietor of the Croce del Sud (who had become a lire millionaire in a few months) and the head waiter, and the chef and the barber and everybody else. Even the bells became silent and the flies less insistent. But there was still no word from H.E.'s secretary. At last something happened. A ray of hope appeared, like the dove after the Flood, on the southern horizon. Our Kenya friends had returned in their Leopard Moth and immediately offered me the use of the plane to take us to Berbera, or Aden, or Djibuti or anywhere I liked. All I would have to pay for would be the petrol. It wouldn't have mattered if I had had to buy the plane too.

No sooner had I accepted this proposal and was preparing to go to the aerodrome when Captain Biroli arrived with a message saying that H.E. would like to see me at once. I rushed round to the Government offices and I was informed by H.E.'s secretary

that arrangements had now been completed for a British lorry, escorted by a detachment of the Camel Corps, to meet me on the borders of British and Italian Somaliland. There would be some difficulty if an Italian military lorry with an Italian officer in charge entered British territory and this compromise had been suggested by Major Lawrence, the Governor of British Somaliland. I thanked H.E.'s secretary and pointed out that I could not risk being held up by the rains, which would almost certainly start before I reached the frontier, and that I had already completed arrangements to go by air.

This taking of plans into my own hands was not too warmly received. H.E. would have to be informed at once and an audience would be arranged for the next morning at ten. At eleven we would start for Berbera, with a letter of introduction to the Commandant at Rocca Littorio, where we would refuel for the second stage. It meant delaying for another day, but I had no choice in the matter. It was impossible to carry enough petrol to take us to Berbera in one stage. At ten the following morning I presented myself at H.E.'s office. At 10.30 I was informed that H.E. had received a telegram from Major Lawrence, and he wanted me to see it before I left. The telegram however could not be found, but I was told the contents. It merely stated that plans had been completed at the other end and further confirmation from Mogadiscio was awaited. At eleven I asked for a glass of *aqua minerale*. At 11.30 General Graziani himself went to his rooms at Government House to look for the missing telegram. At 11.45 he returned without the telegram. I asked for another glass of *aqua minerale*. At twelve a duplicate of the telegram was sent from the wireless office. At 12.15 I signed a statement saying that owing to the rains I would not be able to avail myself of the Italian Government's kind offer to lend me a lorry to take me

as far as the British border. At 12.30 H.E. sent word to say that he would not be able to receive me. At 12.45 I was handed a letter signed by H.E.'s secretary asking the Commandant at Rocca Littorio to supply me with any petrol or oil (on payment) that I required. At last I thought I was free.

I had wasted three valuable daylight hours waiting for that letter. As soon as I got back to the hotel, Mostert, our pilot, announced that it was too late to start that day. We would have to remain yet another day at Mogadiscio. In two days' time, all being well, we would be at Aden, so what matter? At 7 o'clock the following morning the little Leopard Moth climbed into the clouds, more grey and threatening than ever, and Mogadiscio quickly disappeared behind us. Even then it seemed too good to be true. An eternity of scrub and sand opened up before us, broken only once by the model village and plantation founded by the late Duke of Abruzzi. Mostert set the little plane on its course and studied his map. How he could pick out any landmarks in this wilderness passed my understanding. For a short time we followed the Webbe Shibeli which has its source in the Abyssinian highlands and meets the Juba before it empties into the India Ocean at Chisimaio. After that our course lay north-east. The flat, inhospitable waste of scrub and sand spread as far as the horizon in every direction. Occasionally we could pick out a cavalcade of camels wending its way slowly through the scrub. Clusters of *tukals* looked like handfuls of mushrooms. The sky grew blacker and heavier as we sped farther north. The speedometer registered 100 miles an hour, the altimeter 5,000 feet.

It was three hours since we left Mogadiscio. The landscape was becoming more sandy and less scrubby. We should be nearing Rocca Littorio. I searched the horizon with my glasses for anything resembling an

aerodrome. Mostert had not scanned his map for some time and I concluded that his compass told him where to find our destination. Far away on our left I thought I could pick out a line of water. As we approached it looked like the sea. The sea, of course, should have been on our right. I leant forward and shouted to Mostert. His reply was partly drowned by the roar of the engine but I caught the word "Mogadiscio." I think that was the blackest moment of my stay in Italian Somaliland. I had no idea what was wrong, whether we were running out of petrol, or had lost our way, or whether the whole thing was a colossal hoax. Evans ventured the cheerful theory that Mostert had gone suddenly mad. Anyway, we were going back to Mogadiscio. Two hours later we were once more sitting outside the Croce del Sud drinking iced coffee. We had lost our way and Mostert's theory was that at one time we were near Wal Wal. Everybody said that we should have followed the coast, forgetting that we could not replenish our fuel supply and that in any case it was twice as far.

We tried to forget about Leopard Moths and besieged the shipping offices for information. Yes, the *Mazzini* was due to-morrow and there was a second-class cabin available. I threw a bundle of lire notes on the counter and dashed out with my ticket to Aden—and freedom, perhaps, at last. The next evening we sailed.

Things went smoothly enough on the *Mazzini*. The captain said I was to have a first-class cabin and use the first saloon although my ticket was for the second class. This charming act was in such strange contrast to some of our recent experiences that I immediately sent off a telegram to General Graziani thanking him for the many courtesies extended to me during my visit to Italian Somaliland.

Madame de Bonneuil enlivened the four days' journey to Aden with accounts of her three months' stay

in the colony. She also caused many British lorgnettes to be lifted by elderly ladies from Kenya when she appeared in her superbly cut white shorts and jumper *à la matelot*. Moreover, she entirely scandalized a very large and perspiring Italian by telling him that it was unfair that he should have a cabin to himself while she had to share hers with a woman and a precocious infant of four.

The best thing she said to me was that I ought to have arrived at Mogadiscio wearing skirts. I assured her that I had every reason to believe the truth of this, and proposed to accept her advice should I return to Italian Somaliland. It would be much more enjoyable after all to see those desolate, scrubby wastes from the comfortable seat of an aeroplane travelling at a hundred miles an hour than to be jolted along at ten miles an hour in an army lorry.

Jubilee night passed off without so much as a glass of champagne being lifted. The next day we read the following account of the rejoicings in London :

The heart of Empire scene of unparalleled celebration and Jubilee tribute to Majesties of tens thousands many whom stood all night in streets acclaiming with greatest demonstrations love loyalty metropolis ever known stop at St. Paul's cathedral King Queen accompanied forty members their family in presence 5000 leading citizens nation empire joined in thanksgiving service for blessings twenty five years reign stop after return to buckingham palace majesties stood for ten minutes acknowledging frenzied cheers 50000 who stood assembled since early morning and made subsequent appearance afternoon when crowd failed disperse stop royal weather graced majesties progress with day warmest of year unbroken sunshine giving colour gaiety to country wide decorations and ceremonies stop day proceedings terminated with king lighting hydepark bonfire by switch which signalled

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giant illumination scheme throughout british isles which without precedent beacons blazing bennevis skiddaw snowden scawfel and back to starting point London's floodlighting presented amazing spectacle and streets thronged to late hour stop occasion marked by absence casualty excepting heat faints some 8000 cases being dealt with stop.

Aden looked remarkably gay after two months of seeing Il Duce and Vittore Emmanuel III frowning down at us in remote residencies, bishops' palaces, hotel cloak rooms, ships' smoking-rooms, under-secretary's waiting-rooms and the like, and it was a relief to see highly coloured and very early photographs of our own King and Queen smiling graciously down from the walls of Arab, Somali, Indian, Japanese and Chinese houses and shops.

I learned that a *Messageries* boat was leaving for Djibuti the next morning. I booked a cabin and sent a telegram to Northcliffe House announcing that their long-lost Special Correspondent was leaving (without orders) for Addis Ababa.





PART TWO  
*LION RAMPANT*

*“O languid audience, met to see  
The last act of the tragedy  
On that terrific stage afar,  
Where burning towns the footlights are—  
O listless Europe, day by day  
Callously sitting out the play.*

*“Perchance in tempest and in blight,  
On Europe too shall fall the night.  
She sees the victim overborn,  
By worse than ravening lions torn.  
She sees, she hears, with soul unstirred,  
And lifts no hand, and speaks no word,  
But vaunts a brow like theirs who deem  
Men’s wrongs a phrase, men’s rights a dream.  
Yet haply she shall learn too late,  
In some blind hurricane of Fate,  
How fierily alive the things  
She held as fool’s imaginings,  
And, though circuitous and obscure,  
The feet of Nemesis how sure.”*

SIR WILLIAM WATSON

## CHAPTER XII

### MUSSOLINI'S SACRED MISSION

IT was now the middle of May and a peaceful settlement of the dispute was as far off as ever. Italy was making no secret of sending more troops and workmen to East Africa. At the same time she charged Abyssinia with massing troops on the frontier of Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, with receiving tanks and aeroplanes and machine-guns from Germany, with engaging Japanese military instructors and ordering a general mobilization. Even if some of these charges were true (and very few of them were), surely, as a young Ethiopian remarked to me, it was rather like saying that Belgium was guilty of the most aggressive militarism when at the outbreak of war she marshalled all her available man-power to meet an invader far more powerful and better equipped than herself? Mussolini himself proudly declared that Italy's armament firms were working at full pressure. The Italian Minister of Finance announced that the cost of "exigencies" in East Africa had reached, by the end of April, £10,000,000. A certain fear was felt, particularly in France (who had lately made considerable concessions to Italy, including shares in the Djibuti Railway), that the European situation would become more threatening if Italy was to be preoccupied in Africa. Mussolini gave his immediate reassurance that he would keep 900,000 troops under arms in Italy, and stated that "it is just in order to be tranquilly present in Europe that we intend to feel ourselves thoroughly safe in Africa."

Meantime the Wal Wal affair hung fire. The

Emperor realized, very wisely, that it would be impossible to prove who fired the first shot for the simple reason that there were no impartial witnesses present. Any discussions on the point, therefore, must obviously end in a stalemate. He claimed, moreover, that arbitration should be concerned primarily with "the question of the Italo-Ethiopian frontier in accordance with existing treaties." In other words, the real issue, regardless of who fired the first shot, was : "Is Wal Wal in Ethiopian or Italian territory?" Italy bluntly refused to discuss the point and replied by sending more troops and materials to East Africa.

The Emperor addressed yet another appeal to the League. The date was May 13th. "At this critical hour in its history," it said, "the Ethiopian Government earnestly appeals to the Council to see that the territorial integrity and political independence of Ethiopia, a Member of the League of Nations, are respected and preserved against aggression." A week later the Council met and a settlement was reached on different points, chief of these being that the subject matter of arbitration was to be confined to the actual Wal Wal incident regardless of frontier claims. The Commission set up to examine the dispute had to come to an agreement not later than July 25th, and failing that must nominate a fifth arbitrator. The Commission of Five must then settle the dispute not later than August 25th.

The League, everybody knew, was playing for time. Mussolini, too, was playing for time, but for quite different reasons. His plans were not quite ready. Roads had to be built, aerodromes and base camps established, wireless and telegraph communications perfected, the troops themselves acclimatized to high altitude African conditions. And there was another and very important element which had probably escaped the casual European observer. Rain. In

Eritrea they started in May and continued till September. In Abyssinia the "little rains" were due at the beginning of May and lasted for six weeks. These were followed by the heavy rains which lasted into October. At Mogadiscio the monsoon made landing arrangements impossible from the middle of May until the end of August. At the same time the rains in the Ogaden were not as heavy as in the north, and General Graziani, if he had been ready, could have started his campaign months ago. Nature, therefore, would call a truce which, on balance, would affect Italy more adversely than Abyssinia. The Abyssinian would be able to move from one part of his country to another with comparative ease, with only his rifle or a spear to carry. He had no aerodromes to build or heavy artillery to move up to the frontier. The only roads, in the European sense of the word, that he knew, were those around Addis Ababa, and the new one leading from Dirre Dowa to Harar.

On the European stage, Mussolini's antics reminded one of an old Egyptian fable in which a wolf and a lamb were drinking at the Nile. The wolf, looking hungrily at the lamb, remarked, "You are spoiling my drink ; stop dirtying the water !" To which the lamb made meek reply, "How can I dirty the water, because I am standing north of you, and the Nile flows northwards to the sea." "Oh, ho !" snarled the wolf, "then you must have dirtied the water south of me last week." "But I was miles away from here last week," came the timid answer of the lamb. "Well, if it wasn't you it was your father !" roared the wolf. "But my father died many years ago," protested the lamb. "Enough of your nonsense," roared the angry wolf, "I'm going to eat you *now* !"

Mussolini's complaints about frontier raids and aggressions were not receiving the sympathetic ear in

Europe or America that he expected. Great Britain and France had both experienced similar troubles for many years, but neither had had recourse to poison gas and bombs. Mussolini was playing for time, and some people were now daring to say so. The Duce, however, was not going to show his hand just yet. If the words "precautionary measures" had too war-like a ring, he would substitute "protectorate" or "mandate". Abyssinia, declared the Duce, had done nothing to make herself worthy of belonging to the community of civilized nations. "The horrible scourge of slavery still rages in Abyssinia. The entire populations of vast regions conquered by Abyssinia in the past fifty years are still decimated by raids and subjected to the most inhuman servitude." Mussolini was going to carry the Fascist message of civilization into the blackest parts of the dark continent, but instead of Bibles he was taking bombs. Abyssinia, henceforth, was to be the Italian white man's burden, and the rest of Europe, instead of grumbling, should be thankful that it was not going to be their burden.

The Duce, like most dictators, possesses a conveniently short memory. In 1923 Abyssinia made her request for admission to the League of Nations. Count Bonin-Longare, Italy's spokesman on that occasion, supporting Abyssinia's application, said that "Abyssinia's request constituted a tribute to the League of Nations. This tribute was of great value as coming from a distant nation which had hitherto remained outside the great international movements, but which, by the remarkable tenacity with which it had been able to preserve its religious faith and national character throughout the ages, had acquired *titles of nobility to which due justice must be paid there.*" (The italics are mine.) Referring to slavery, Count Bonin-Longare went on to say that "the gradual humanizing of habits of life had brought about an improvement in their position, so that *it was*

## MUSSOLINI'S SACRED MISSION

*more appropriate to speak of serfs than of slavery."* (The italics are again mine.) Furthermore, Italy's representative emphasized the fact that "due tribute must be paid to the enlightenment of the princes who had succeeded one another on the Ethiopian throne during a long succession of years, *more especially to Ras Tafari* (the present Emperor), *a broad-minded Prince, in touch with modern ideas*, to whose credit must be placed the decree of November 1918, enforcing with greater severity all previous edicts for the punishment of those engaging in slave traffic."

Of course Italy had her private reasons for supporting Abyssinia's admission to the League in 1923, just as she had her public reasons for demanding the expulsion of Abyssinia from the League in 1935. She wanted concessions. The Emperor undoubtedly interpreted "concessions" as being the narrow end of the Italian wedge. He was sparing, therefore, in what he granted. There was the wireless installation at Addis Ababa, two timber concessions, a potash concession, a gold concession, and the Dessie-Assab road. These were paltry offerings, no doubt, and a bitter disappointment to Italy. But if one leaves out of account the Rickett oil concession (the full truth of which is not known at the time of writing) Italy has had a larger share of concessions than any other country during the last ten years. And I have it on the authority of Colonel Sandford, who is probably the best-informed European at Addis Ababa, that no Italian requests for concessions have been turned down by the Emperor on the score of nationality.

Italy's tactics in 1923 had failed, and in 1934 and 1935 she has had to find new ones. Her trump card was slavery. The word had a revolting sound to European ears and conjured up appalling pictures of human suffering. It was a blot on civilization, and Mussolini was going to stamp it out in his own



particular way. Again not with Bibles but with bombs. I must admit I had my own misgivings on the subject, and I determined to find out as much as possible while I was in Abyssinia.

My first opportunity of learning something about slavery turned up soon after we arrived at Djibuti. An indescribably dirty *Messageries* boat, heavily laden with homing French officials and their wives, had brought us across from Aden, and a few minutes after landing we were waiting in the office of the British Vice-Consul, who was busy with the formalities of repatriating an Abyssinian slave. Our dishevelled appearance after a night on the *Angier* no doubt suggested that we were clients of a similar nature. On production of my miniature *Daily Mail* passport, bearing the signature of Mr. Douglas Crawford, I was able to set the Vice-Consul's mind at rest. What surprised me most was the well-nourished and smart appearances of this young Abyssinian. If he was a typical slave, my ideas of slavery needed drastic revision and adjustment.

He told the Vice-Consul that he had been sold and resold half a dozen times since he had become a slave at the age of twelve, fifteen years before. His parents had allowed him to go as servant to an innocent-looking Arab, and not until the boy reached the other side of the Red Sea did he realize his true plight. But he complained of no cruelties. A slave's lot, in fact, is often far happier and more congenial than life in his native land. His master, if he is kind and sensible, feeds and clothes him well and rewards him justly for his labours.

A different story, of course, could be told by slaves who have been bought and sold at Gondar, the old capital of Abyssinia. These are "slaves" in the horrible, European sense of the word. Many of them had been taken as hostages from tribes whose chiefs had refused to pay their tolls to the Government. They were

offered for sale in the dealers' cellars (the old slave market having been abolished by the Emperor's orders), and here until a year or two ago the Arab buyers came to inspect the human merchandise, chained to the walls, and naked so that the purchaser could see what he was getting for his money. A man might fetch as much as £60, a woman £30, and a child £20. They could, of course, be bought for much less than that. The caravans then made their long and heart-breaking journey, slave chained to slave, to the Red Sea, usually through French Somaliland, and the Arabs tightly packed their black ivory freight into *dhow*s and smuggled them across to the Arabian coast.

Sometimes the slaves were concealed amongst quite innocent-looking cargo, such as ivory, copper and skins, but to-day the traffic is made increasingly difficult by the presence of British destroyers and sloops which are constantly patrolling the two coasts. Their task, however, is not an easy one, because the Red Sea is nearly twice the length of Great Britain, and its coasts are treacherous and guarded by rocks, reefs and sandbanks. The Arab *dhow*s, which draw very little water, can easily evade their pursuers by slipping into small inlets where no warship would dare follow. The dealers, too, have a spy system which keeps them informed of the exact movements of every British warship in the Red Sea.

Nevertheless the combined efforts of the Emperor within his realm, and those of the British Government along the coasts of the Red Sea, have reduced the traffic to a minimum. The Vice-Consul put the figure at not more than a few hundred a year. This is a very different state of affairs to that which prevailed in the days of Menelik, who made no practical efforts (although many promises) to stop the trade. Every slave who sets foot on English territory to-day can claim his freedom, and this young Abyssinian had presented himself

at the office of the English Vice-Consul at Jeddah. He had then been sent to Djibuti, at the expense of the British Government; and from Djibuti to Addis Ababa, or any other part of Abyssinia, he would travel at the Emperor's expense. Mrs. Sandford's children at Addis Ababa have been brought up by an Abyssinian nurse who was carried away into slavery as a young girl. She was saved, however, by the timely arrival of a British sloop just as the slave-filled *dhow* was approaching the coast of Arabia. Sometimes these slaves who have escaped from their masters change their minds about returning home to unemployment when they reach Djibuti. This occasionally puts the Vice-Consul in an embarrassing position, as for instance when two weeping Abyssinian belles presented themselves on his doorstep at midnight.

Slavery in Abyssinia itself is a very different matter indeed. If one is to believe the bombastic utterances of Mussolini and some of the sensational articles in European newspapers one would conclude that Abyssinia is a land of barbaric practices and customs. Some of these charges may have foundation in fact with regard to the fierce Ogaden and Danakil tribes, but when Count Bonin-Longare said of Abyssinia that "it was more appropriate to speak of serfs than of slaves" he made a statement the accuracy and truth of which he probably did not realize at the time. These domestic serfs exist in millions in Abyssinia. The Abyssinians have an old proverb which says, "The slave has no money and therefore has no money troubles. Therefore he is happier than any of us." He is fed and clothed and cared for by his master, he can freely express his views and can prosecute anyone who dares to ill-treat him. The only alternative to domestic serfdom is unemployment, and this leads to begging, stealing and sometimes killing. The serf does not regard

himself as a "slave." He is infinitely happier and more content than the man on the dole in England, and I venture to suggest that these domestic serfs of Abyssinia enjoy more intellectual freedom than the political slaves of Fascist Italy.

While I was at Addis Ababa, Harar, and in other parts of Abyssinia I had a regular "boy" who could speak English and acted as interpreter, adviser, philosopher and friend. In addition to this "boy" I could have taken on at least a score of "slaves" who offered their services to me *gratis*, only asking for their food, costing a few shillings a week, in return. I took on one or two of these Abyssinians at different times to act as bodyguards (to protect me from Europeans, as I shall explain later !) and also to look after my baggage. One hefty fellow broke into a flood of tears when I told him that I could not take him back to Europe with me. Another who offered his services to me as guide produced a genuine letter of recommendation bearing a red crown and the words Buckingham Palace at the head of the notepaper. He was looked up to by all the others as a very great personage indeed.

I always remind people who say to me that slavery in Abyssinia is a blot on civilization (they are usually people who underpay their own servants and inflict fines for breakages) that "slavery" of a similar nature existed in Scotland less than a hundred years ago and as recently as December 31st, 1761, the following advertisement appeared in a London newspaper: "For Sale. . . . Healthy Negro girl, aged about fifteen years. Speaks good English, washes well, does household work and has had smallpox."

In 1932 Lord Noel-Buxton and Lord Polwarth, on behalf of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigine Protection Society, had a series of interviews with the Emperor on the question of slavery. The result of these interviews

was that a Slavery Department was set up to combat the slave trade and to proceed with the work of gradually abolishing slavery. The Emperor, a little optimistically, perhaps, undertook to complete this huge task in twenty years. At first everything promised well. But it was not long before the Emperor's good intentions were confronted with the opposition of the great Rases and other elements opposed to reform. Sixty-two local slavery bureaux were established in different parts of the country, to which were attached judges responsible for the liberation of slaves and repression of the offences punishable under the Abolition Laws. A British adviser to the Slavery Department was appointed, but at the end of 1933, after fruitless endeavours to obtain action, he felt compelled to resign. However, as Lord Noel-Buxton remarked a short time ago, "it should in fairness be said that the breakdown of reforms has been largely due to the action of Italy. The attention of the Emperor was diverted to other activities, and the funds essential for such reforms as the establishment of a paid police and judiciaries were otherwise absorbed. No one who is well informed on Ethiopian affairs doubts the good will of the Emperor in the matter of reforms, both as regards slavery and in other directions. Much sympathy is felt for him in his present situation. He would have been in a better position to overcome the obstruction of the more conservative elements in his country to his attempts at reform if he had not had to mobilize national feeling against an external threat."

The Emperor's reply to the Italian charge that he openly permits slavery in his country is that in 1923, when he was Ras Tafari and Regent of Abyssinia, he issued his anti-slavery edict. At that time there were some 2,000,000 domestic slaves in Abyssinia. In the Emperor's edict it was provided that the children of slaves should be considered free from bondage and that

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when their masters died, slaves should automatically obtain their freedom. He had, at his own expense, founded a school for the children of liberated slaves and they are trained to-day to become useful citizens as plumbers, carpenters, and masons. A special anti-slavery police force had also been built up, and anyone convicted of keeping slaves was liable to a sentence of ten years' imprisonment. The Emperor claimed that in twelve years more than a quarter of a million slaves had been liberated. Furthermore, he contended that slavery would cease to exist in Abyssinia within less than a generation.

Now that the Emperor's plans for reform have been interrupted by other and more grave national considerations no one can say when the domestic serfs of Abyssinia will become wage-earning labourers owing allegiance to no man. The problem is a deep one having its roots far back in history, back in fact to the days of the Queen of Sheba herself, who sent an advance present of three hundred slaves before her visit to Solomon. They say, in his own country, that the Emperor is several hundred years ahead of his times. That is probably true. But the Emperor is a young man and he is far too wise to attempt to move the clock forward too quickly. He is fully alive to historical and economic realities. Had he used more vigorous measures to stamp out slavery the country might have been plunged into Civil War and the clock put back another hundred years.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the whole problem is the fact that the "slaves" themselves do not want their freedom. To-day they are happy and contented in serving their masters, as their fathers and grandfathers did before them. To-morrow, if they are free, they will have no food or place to lay their heads. Not unless the good Benito has thought of that too.

## CHAPTER XIII

### LIFE ON THE CHIT SYSTEM

“**T**O the tourist, as to the passenger, Djibuti, with its eternally blue sky, its houses and mosques entirely white, its streets well planned and cleanly kept, even in the native town, presents itself in an elegant and smiling aspect ; some of its principal thoroughfares are bordered with pink and white oleanders always in flower.”

This pretty description of the capital of French Somaliland was written by a Frenchman for the little booklet issued by the Messageries Maritimes. Altogether I had six days in which to acquaint myself with the charms of Djibuti—three while waiting for the train to take me to Dirre Dowa, and another three, on my return from Addis Ababa, waiting for a boat to take me to Suez. I had, therefore, ample opportunity of studying the “elegant and smiling aspects” of its streets and houses and mosques.

An amiable Greek from the Hotel Continental came down to the boat to look after our luggage and to smooth our way with customs, porters, coolies, natives diving for coins, the doctor, the curio-sellers, money-changers, and the like. We were apparently the only passengers disembarking. In a remarkably short time we were in the company's tender making for the pier. On our way we passed the heeled-over hulk of the *Fontainebleau*, like some huge monster left high and dry by the tide, over whose carcass busy natives swarmed like ants. Many futile attempts had been made to raise the wreck of the French luxury liner, and now it was

being turned into a jetty under a new harbour improvement scheme. Away across the other side of the harbour lay another smaller wreck. It was a grim reminder of the fate of four hundred French soldiers who were slaughtered by the Somalis fifty years ago when the *Penguin*, a paddle-steamer, stuck in the mud.

Djibuti has two seasons. From October to May, according to the guide book, it is "very easily endurable" and, at times, even "agreeable". But the other months are characterized by a torrid heat which approaches 120 degrees in the shade. It was only 109 degrees in the shade on the day of our arrival. I was able, therefore, to say to our Greek friend, "You find this hot? You should go to Massowah!" A gleaming new taxi deposited us at the Hotel Continental, in the Place Menelik, and here we were greeted by the entire family of amiable Greeks, fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, sisters and brothers. I couldn't understand, at first, how so large a family could make a livelihood out of an hotel in Djibuti. Nobody came here for pleasure. It was merely the terminus for the *Compagnie du Chemin de Fer Franco-Ethiopien*.

My Aden time-table had said that the twice-weekly train to Addis Ababa left Djibuti on Wednesdays and Saturdays. This was Friday. Twenty-four hours would be more than enough of Djibuti. I had to get a further Abyssinian visa, and also change some of my lire into thalers. My baggage I had reduced to two suit-cases, the remainder, including a thousand cigarettes and my antique revolver, I left at the Customs unopened. In Abyssinia, I had been warned, it is best to travel as lightly as possible. And they are very particular about firearms. I inquired the hour at which the train left the next morning, and I was informed that the time-table had just been changed, and that the trains now left on Mondays and Fridays instead of Wednesdays and



Saturdays. The train, in fact, had left that very morning, an hour before we landed. There were three days in front of us. I realized now how the Greek family made their living and continued, in spite of the white heat and glaring light, to look happy and contented.

"Everybody who comes to Djibuti experiences this kind of thing," the Vice-Consul assured us, after we had been sitting for an hour in his office, under a big fan, discussing slavery and drinking tumblers of iced lemon-squash. "You will find plenty of amusements here to occupy you for three days," he continued. "There is a cinema on Saturday, and you can see the salt works, or go for a run to Zeila and bathe at the club, or play golf. And there's the native quarter."

The short stroll from the hotel to the Vice-Consul's office had proved a feat of almost superhuman physical endurance, so golf was obviously out of the question. Zeila sounded sinister and forbidding, and a swim at the club rather dangerous, when one was consuming lemon-squash at the rate of about eight pints a day. The only alternative was to sit in an iron chair on the pavement outside the hotel and read Evelyn Waugh's description of how he spent three nightmare days at Djibuti. But I had no sooner taken up my position and opened my book when a swarm of Somalis, Arabs, Danakils and Hindus descended upon me with post cards, ostrich-feather fans, sharks' teeth, hippopotamus whips, fly-swishes, and the usual assortment of cheap curios from Japan. These high-speed salesmen refused to take "no" for an answer (even when the police dispersed them with cracks of their whips), and once, in desperation, when I tried to put them off by asking if they had any cheap socks, a dozen immediately disappeared round the corner and returned a minute later with boxes full of socks. It was the same with the taxis. I have never seen so many new and gleaming-

looking taxis as at Djibuti, but if one dared to stroll across the Place Menelik to buy a film or a bottle of quinine, it was the signal for half a dozen taxi-drivers to frenziedly press their starters, crash their gears, and bear down upon one with a chorus of screaming brakes. On one occasion this ended in a collision and a case in court.

The first day passed off in this hide-and-seek kind of manner. In the evening we went down to the club, where most of the upper ten of Djibuti congregate about 6 p.m., play bridge, drink cocktails, and sign innumerable chits. Djibuti is a paradise for people who live on the chit system. You can do everything there by signing a chit. Even when we went to the cinema, our host, the Italian Vice-Consul, signed a chit for our seats. It was this same Italian official who, not long after I left Abyssinia, figured in an "incident" on the station at Dirre Dowa. He was very helpful during my enforced exile at Djibuti, and not least of his services to me was to exchange my vast bunch of lire notes into francs and thalers.

I tried to get him to talk about the war, but he refused to be drawn. I heard, however, that he was keeping his government fully informed of the arrivals of war materials for Abyssinia. This fitted in with what I was told by Europeans in Abyssinia, that Italy has maintained a vast and entirely unnecessary consular service throughout Abyssinia for some years past, for the sole purpose of spying out the land. I even heard it said that the Italians, thanks to their efficient and highly paid consular service in Abyssinia, possessed more accurate maps of Abyssinia than the Abyssinians themselves.

The stories of ships arriving at Djibuti loaded with arms from Japan even the Italian Consul denied. A few weeks previously a train-load of modern rifles and

ammunition of Jugo-Slavian manufacture had gone up to Addis Ababa, but very little else had arrived. There was difficulty about export and import licences, and sometimes a consignment of rifles would be held up at Djibuti for weeks.

The next day a rumour was current in Djibuti that the Emperor had left Addis Ababa in the royal train for Dirre Dowa. This was considered a significant move, and it was hinted that he was making for the Ogaden with the purpose of distributing money amongst the tribes whose allegiance to the Abyssinian cause was still a matter of doubt. I tried to find out whether the Emperor had actually left Addis Ababa, as my own immediate plans depended very largely on the royal movements. The railway people could tell me nothing, but it had been rumoured for some time that the Emperor proposed to visit Harar for the installation of his second son, Prince Makonnen, as Duke of Harar. The firm of Mohammed Aly, who sell everything from soap and Japanese jewellery to motor-cars and insurance policies, had heard nothing from their branch in Addis Ababa. The Emperor is said to have a lot of money in this firm, who are known as the Selfridges of the Red Sea. There was only one person who could tell me the Emperor's exact movements. The Italian Vice-Consul. Yes, the Emperor *had* left Addis Ababa that morning, and was travelling straight through in the royal train to Dirre Dowa, where he would spend two nights at the castle. On Monday he would proceed to Harar by car, with the Empress, Prince Makonnen and Princess Tsahai, for a ten days' visit.

My plans had to be speedily rearranged, as I had originally intended to make direct for Addis Ababa. A message was dispatched to the British Vice-Consul at Harar, asking him to arrange an audience with the Emperor as soon as possible. Meantime, there was still

a day and a half to be destroyed. In despair I went out to the salt works. It made me feel a great deal hotter than reading Evelyn Waugh outside the hotel. Gangs of natives, stripped to the waist, toiled under the pitiless sun with pails and shovels like troupes of robots. As they hurried from the evaporating-pans to the pyramids of salt they formed a human chain, Somalis, Abyssinians and Arabs, smiling and chattering, and apparently unconscious of the blistering heat. At Massowah, Aden and Djibuti, man has succeeded in harnessing the sun's scorching rays. I was told that two million tons of water a day are evaporated by the African sun. The method is to convey the salt water by canals into the evaporating-pans, and when these are filled the floodgates are closed and evaporation begins. The brine quickly dries up and the crystallized salt is ready to be conveyed in buckets to the heaps, which rapidly assume the shape of pyramids. There it awaits the arrival of the salt-ships from Japan.

On the Saturday night we went to the open-air cinema. The entire European colony, some three hundred in all, mostly French, were there. All the women wore shorts. The natives occupied a roped-off part under the screen. They enjoyed it all like children. Just behind us sat a distinguished-looking Frenchman, next to whom sat a young Abyssinian in European clothes. I noticed that the audience frequently cast glances in their direction, and a number of the Europeans bowed to the Frenchman. I asked our Italian host who these two were, and I was informed that the Abyssinian was the son of Lej Yasu, the deposed Emperor of Abyssinia about whom I was to hear more at Harar. His companion was the Governor of French Somaliland. I have quite forgotten what the films were about, but I remember that the interruptions and breakdowns were even more frequent than at Mogadiscio, that a considerable part

of the programme consisted of "shots" from films that were "coming shortly", and that one picture started off silently, and after an hour suddenly developed into a talkie. When we heard the voices we realized why so much of the picture had been silent.

On the Sunday we had been invited to motor across the border to have lunch with the District Commissioner at Zeila. The camel-track, which one could hardly dignify with the name of road, picked its way through scrub and sand for thirty weary miles. A miniature fort and look-out, flying the red, white and blue of France, and garrisoned by Senegalese troops, marked the French boundary. A little farther on a similar fort and look-out, flying the Union Jack, guarded by Somalis, reminded us that we were now on British territory. This was part of the Zeila corridor which the British Government were to offer to Abyssinia in their efforts to find a satisfactory "curtain" for the Geneva melodrama. I believe that if some of our Members of Parliament had visited this part of British Somaliland before they got so excited about Great Britain handing over a tiny part of one of her protectorates, they would have thought quite differently. It was not such a magnificent gesture as all that. There was no excitement when we handed over Jubaland to Italy in 1925. The Zeila corridor is about as uninviting a piece of country as you could find in the whole of Africa. You can only make a journey in this unhealthy region if you take a supply of water. I doubt very much whether the few Somali herdsmen would have worried greatly whether they were subjects of the white King George V or the black Emperor Haile Selassie I. The monotony of our drive was broken occasionally by scattered heaps of boulders, marking the spots where natives had fallen in tribal battles. Once or twice we passed a little hut with flags flying at the corners of the roof.

These were the last resting-places of chiefs, to which the natives brought offerings of food for the spirits of the departed.

British Somaliland is the only country I know where you see camels walking in the sky and goats climbing trees. This, of course, is the effect of the mirage, and not the result of exposing your head to the sun. Zeila floats in the sky in just the same way for many miles before you reach this strange jumble of Arabian, Turkish, Egyptian and Portuguese architecture. The District Commissioner lives in a tall stone house outside the town, and with the exception of his two wireless officers there are no other white men between here and Berbera. His life is as lonely as the Italian Resident's at Jelib and Bardera.

I used to think that there is something a little heroic about these men silently and grimly serving their country in these lonely outposts of empire. The reward, an O.B.E. or a job in the Colonial Office, seemed so small, the price so great. Is it worth it? To some people I think it is. They enjoy this splendid isolation from our petrol-pump civilization as much as they appreciate the undisputed authority which they exercise for hundreds of square miles. I believe, too, there is a certain type of mind which *prefers* to read a newspaper a month old, and positively resents the sound of the postman's knock each morning. It is a pity there aren't more Zeilas.

Here, even the sea makes no sound and the only contact with the outside world (apart from the wireless) is the daily arrival of the motor-bus from Djibuti, packed with excited, chattering natives. The Jubilee was still being celebrated when we arrived at Zeila, and the buildings were decorated with bunting and flags, which the natives had subscribed for themselves. In the large open market-place a strange game

was in progress as we entered the town. At first it looked as if the entire population, consisting of some 7,000 natives of mixed tribes and races, was taking part. This is Zeila's special brand of football. Two sides divide themselves according to their tribes or villages, and a ball, smaller than a football, is thrown from one side to the other. If the ball is dropped, the man who drops it runs as fast as he can towards the boundary, while the members of the tribe who threw it rush to pick it up and pursue him. If they succeed in hitting him before he reaches the boundary, it counts as a point to their side, but if they fail, the ball is thrown back into the crowd and the thrower in turn runs toward the boundary. The game is much more exciting to watch than it sounds, and it is surprising to see how fast these Somalis can run, and how accurate is their aim.

At lunch, the District Commissioner gave me a few interesting statistics and facts about British Somaliland. I am afraid he was a little shocked at my ignorance of the strategic importance of this stretch of coast, guarding, with Aden opposite, the gateway to India. This importance, however, has been materially reduced since the Aden defences have been strengthened by a squadron of the R.A.F. The total area of British Somaliland is some 78,000 square miles, and it has an estimated population of 300,000. On the high plateau, which ranges from 1,000 to 7,000 feet in height, a simple nomad people eke out a precarious existence as herdsmen and shepherds, but famine and disease decimate the flocks periodically. The rain falls erratically, and the few water-holes are always congested. This scarcity of water is the curse of British Somaliland. The inland towns of Sheikh (where the inhabitants of Berbera live in the summer) and Burao are now provided with a piped supply of water, but the arid plains remain only fit for wild game

in the hot summer months. There is a fair export of skins from the Protectorate, but at the end of each year British Somaliland costs the taxpayer some £75,000. But for its political importance (and the Mad Mullah) Great Britain would have given up British Somaliland years ago. A point I did not know before was that General Baratieri, who was defeated at Adowa, had contemplated invading Abyssinia via Zeila, but Lord Salisbury had refused to give the necessary permission.

At Zeila, I gathered, life was uneventful and the only recent happening of importance was the arrival of a Jubilee medal for the Chief of Police. This was, perhaps, the most interesting event since 1901, when an Abyssinian mission passed through Zeila on its way to delimit the Italian frontier. On that occasion an Abyssinian had drenched a cat with petrol, set light to it, and let it run amok in the town. Zeila itself caught fire, but the town escaped serious damage. Afterwards the head of the Abyssinian mission offered to pay indemnity in the customary manner of chopping off the arm of the offender. Just recently the District Commissioner had had an unusual problem to solve. He had removed the native brothels to a spot outside the town. Clients now complained that they had too far to walk, and by the time they reached their destination felt too tired for any further recreation. The District Commissioner was considering the question of removing the brothels back to Zeila again.

I was interested to hear that the Somalis possess a strong sense of humour, a lively imagination, and almost as much blarney as the Irish. The first quality surprised me because the Somalis at Mogadiscio always looked sad and brooding, and rarely allowed a smile to steal across their solemn countenances. There, perhaps they had their reasons. No one knows where the Somali race sprang from, but there is good reason for thinking that



Arab blood flows in their veins. At the same time there are no points of resemblance between the Arab and Somali languages. The Somali very rarely strays from his native land, and when he goes as far as Aden it is said that he only does so to acquire wealth, a wife, and experience. When he has found these he returns to his own barren, shadeless land.

The District Commissioner assured me that there was no truth in the rumours emanating from Rome that Japanese arms were being smuggled through Zeila and being conveyed via Jig Jigga to Harar. Attempts had been made from time to time to smuggle arms into the country for private individuals, but these were not destined for the Abyssinian Government. At Berbera two hundred lorries had arrived recently, and had been driven up to Harar. The Emperor would naturally prefer to receive all his war supplies via Berbera and Zeila, as the rates for carrying freight on the Djibuti Railway are prohibitively high.

We drank beer at lunch, which had the excellent effect of sending me off to sleep as soon as we got in the car on our way back to Djibuti. Not even the bumping and lurching as we floundered across dried-up river-beds and watercourses disturbed my heavy slumber. When we reached the Hotel Continental the amiable Greek was in a great state of excitement. A telegram had arrived for me. Next to the arrival and departure of the trains and boats, a telegram is the most exciting event in Djibuti. It was from the British Vice-Consul in Harar, to say that he had arranged with the Emperor's secretary for an audience for the following Thursday morning at nine o'clock. I was astonished at the promptness with which my request had received attention . . . and I a complete stranger, and the representative of a newspaper which had shown little sympathy for the Abyssinian cause. It contrasted strangely with my reception

at Mogadiscio, where I arrived with a letter from Mussolini to the Governor-General, and where I represented the one paper in England which had backed Mussolini from the start.

I dashed down to the station, and without thinking of the cost, paid over £32 for two first-class tickets to Addis Ababa. It was not till afterwards that I realized that I had actually saved several pounds by booking through to Addis Ababa, although I was only going as far as Dirre Dowa, and continuing my journey to the capital a week later. At precisely two minutes past seven the next morning—as punctually as any express leaving Paddington—we chugged lazily out of Djibuti station and began the most extraordinary railway journey in the world.

## CHAPTER XIV

### RHINOCEROS EXPRESS

THE Djibuti nightmare had ended. A great adventure had begun. At last I was to see inside this "treasure house locked since the beginning of time", upon which the covetous eyes of Europe and Asia had rested since the days of the Old Testament. In a few months' time, perhaps, it would be too late.

We had arrived at the station fully half an hour before the "Rhinoceros Express" was due to leave, because we had been warned that traffic was heavy just now, and on this exclusive train it is impossible to book seats in advance. Actually it would have been better if we had arrived a whole hour before time because there are many formalities to be gone through before a European passenger can take his seat in the train for Addis Ababa. Fortunately our Greek friend accompanied us to the station and many of these rough places were made smooth for us. By a miracle of elimination we had succeeded in compressing all our luggage into two large Japanese suitcases, the locks of which already (we had bought the cases a week before) refused to function. I had carried this "travel light" theory a little too far as I was to discover later. Each case was carefully scrutinized by the Customs officials, and my typewriter and German camera and field-glasses aroused great interest. They were looking for firearms, of course, and I thanked Heaven that I had left my antique revolver with the Port Authorities.

The platform presented an extraordinary spectacle. Djibuti of the smiling and elegant aspect had suddenly gone mad. A babel of tongues filled the air. There was an atmosphere of expectancy about it all, as if we were on the eve of some momentous event. This same scene is re-enacted four times a week, twice when the train leaves for Addis Ababa, and twice when it arrives back at Djibuti. It is on these occasions that Djibuti stirs from its siesta. Smartly dressed Frenchwomen talked animatedly as they walked up and down. They had disbanded their shorts for so important an occasion as this. Faces that I had seen at the cinema, in the hotel, in the club and the cafés, mingled in this excited throng, all talking at the top of their voices, and all apparently with important and mysterious reasons for being on the platform. Postal officials carrying sacks of mail shouted at the engine driver, and the engine driver shouted at the postal officials. Somali porters fought with each other for the right to carry our two suitcases. Dogs barked. The engine, as old as Abyssinia itself (actually made in Switzerland and with the proud name "Rhinoceros" inscribed in English and Amharic on its side), gave forth strange rumblings and puffs of contentment. Native salesmen bargained over the price of bottles of mineral water and packets of chocolate. My own baggage I soon gave up as lost and the amiable Greek had disappeared in the crush. The clock said five minutes to seven. There was not a sign of Evans. The noise was now too great to hear oneself speak. I found myself standing in front of a white carriage. I wondered if it had been reserved for the Emperor, but I climbed the steep iron steps and found myself in a neat, clean compartment with bolt upright seats and white dust-covers. There were three or four Europeans in the other two compartments.

At seven o'clock, two minutes before the train was due to start on its three days' journey, the anxious face of Evans appeared amongst the crowd below. It was followed by the still more anxious face of the amiable Greek. And behind them two shouting and perspiring Somalis, with my two suitcases borne perilously aloft, fought in the surging mob to reach the white carriage. Whistles, shrill and piercing, cut through the air; a great wave of faces seemed to rush up at me. We were moving. I caught the end of one of the cases and dragged it through the window. The other crashed at my feet as the wave of faces suddenly disappeared from view. Evans, I thought, had been left behind, but he, too, appeared dramatically out of the African sky, bathed in sweat but smiling as ever.

The adventure had begun. For the first half-hour I watched the landscape slowly unfold itself as we crawled and panted and twisted our way into the hills behind Djibuti towards the frontier. The sun-scorched rocks and burning sands seemed to go on for ever. The heat was becoming insufferable. Three days of this kind of thing would be too much for the strongest nerves. I pulled down the blind and took stock of the passengers in the other two compartments. One of these was an Abyssinian of very striking appearance and evidently a person of some standing. He had two servants with him who swished the flies away from his face and were arranging cushions and rugs for their master's comfort. He smiled and addressed me in French. He spoke like a Frenchman and informed me that he, too, was going to Dirre Dowa, to meet the new Governor of Harar. He had been to Djibuti on Government business, which I concluded had something to do with arms and ammunition. We became firm friends by the time we reached Dirre Dowa. If he was typical of the upper class

Abyssinian I felt I was going to like them very much.

This reminds me, too, that if you want to insult an Ethiopian you will refer to him as an Abyssinian. It is like calling a Chinese a Chinaman. Ethiopia means "Land of the Red Faces"; Abyssinian is a word originally applied by the Arabs to the Ethiopians and means "Mongrel". Although they are a mixed race they naturally resent the use of this word.

The European passengers, three of them, were deeply immersed in books and succeeded, no doubt as they intended, in looking mysterious. They were about as uninteresting and non-communicative as railway passengers in any other part of the world. They didn't look like big-game hunters, authors, spies, special correspondents, or remittance men, so I made no attempt to solve their mysteries. Instead I went back to my compartment and settled down to read a little book I had been given by a Frenchman in Djibuti describing the building of this comic-opera railway.

The French, with an eye on future trade and seeing that Abyssinia had no outlet to the sea, obtained a concession from the Emperor Menelik in 1894, to build a railway from Djibuti to Addis Ababa. A company was formed which paid the Emperor a million rifles as part of the purchase price of the Concession. These rifles are still in use. A Swiss engineer was put in charge and after eight years' struggle in the face of tremendous obstacles Dirre Dowa was reached. Apart from the unsympathetic geographical features of the country that had to be traversed the engineers were constantly harassed by the hostile attitude of the natives themselves. The simple Abyssinians and Somalis not unnaturally thought that the railway was the work of the devil himself. They had an unpleasant habit of pulling up sleepers and carrying away telegraph

poles in the middle of the night. Even to-day they cut down the telegraph wires to make bangles and trinkets for their sweethearts. In 1902 the company was in very low water and it looked as if the idea of continuing the line to the Capital might have to be abandoned.

Financial aid was sought in Britain and a large block of shares was taken up by British speculators. France looked on with alarm and saw the control of the railway slipping out of her hands. Accordingly the French Colonial Minister drew up a new agreement whereby French Somaliland contributed an annual subsidy of 500,000 francs towards the railway. Work was resumed in 1906 between Dirre Dowa and Addis Ababa, and these last two hundred miles were the most difficult that the engineers had to face. Wild mountain ranges, fields of lava, steep gorges and ravines, all had to be overcome with dynamite, viaducts and tunnels. The natives, from whom the engineers were now protected by Menelik's soldiers, watched the iron invasion with awe and terror. When mountain sides were being blasted away they fancied they saw devils leaping out of the rocks. . . .

It was not until 1914, twenty years after the work had been begun, that the last rail was laid at Addis Ababa, 460 miles from Djibuti. It was a stupendous feat of engineering and an epic of human endurance and courage. But the company was now in very deep water indeed. The only way to attain solvency was to place prohibitive charges on passengers and freight. The Abyssinians, with their childish love of superlatives, may justly claim that theirs is the most expensive and the slowest train in the world. The first class single fare costs £16, as compared with £5 for a journey of similar length in Great Britain. This, perhaps, is not outrageously expensive, but if you wanted to send a

ton of freight from Djibuti to Addis Ababa it would cost you £40. No wonder the Emperor would prefer to have his rifles and ammunition sent via Berbera or Zeila.

The strategical importance of the railway in the present trouble with Italy has, however, been exaggerated in some quarters. In the event of war, probably Italy's first move would be to send aeroplanes from Assab to bomb the railway near the French frontier. (As France still owns the bulk of the shares in the company, it will be interesting to see what her attitude will be in this eventuality.) Abyssinia's railway link with supplies from Europe will have been cut. But this will not be a death-blow as there will still be Khartoum, Berbera and Zeila. The Abyssinians themselves, alive to the probable course of events, were busy even in May and June building duplicate lines and viaducts.

I pulled up my blind to see what was happening outside. We seemed to be moving by a series of violent exertions. As we rounded bends we developed incredible lists to port and starboard. The seats were beginning to feel very hard. The glare of the sun made one feel dizzy, although we had not removed our pith-helmets. The thermometer registered 120 degrees in the shade. The only living things within sight were camels which, against this grim background of rocks and boulders and blazing sand, gave an eerie, dead planet effect to the scene. I pulled the blind down again and once more thanked Heaven that I was only going as far as Dirre Dowa.

Suddenly there was a scream of brakes. Blinds flew up in the white carriages. Shutters were pushed down in the grey carriages which accommodated the second and third class passengers. Faces appeared at windows. The French engine driver and his native



mechanic were running back along the line towards the rear of the train. The engine driver began to climb a telegraph pole. In a minute he was manipulating two pieces of wire which had been severed by some warrior seeking a trinket for his lady-love. (In some parts of Abyssinia they prefer human trinkets.) The work of repair took less than a minute. Soon we were panting, lurching and staggering on our way again. The slope was steep at the beginning of our four hundred and fifty mile climb into the rockbound stronghold of Ethiopia. But the old "Rhinoceros" strove gallantly onwards. Sometimes, on a very steep incline, the wheels failed to grip the rails and the brakes had to be violently applied to prevent us from slipping back to Djibuti. With much snorting, shuddering and shaking, our rush to destruction was forestalled and we continued on our weary way. After five hours of this kind of thing we arrived at Douenle, where the red, green, and gold flag indicated that we were now on Abyssinian territory.

The scene was very different from Djibuti. There was no platform. A small corrugated iron building served as ticket office, waiting-room and Customs shed. There was no inspection of baggage but three formidable-looking Abyssinians in uniform came along to our compartment and inspected our passports. One of them, who looked slightly more formidable than his colleagues, looked hard at the photograph in my passport and paid me the supreme compliment of not recognizing me by it. He looked at me and then at Evans. He turned it sideways and even upside down. Finally he passed it to his two assistants who stamped another superb design in Amharic lettering alongside the lions and crowns and angels.

The Abyssinian in the next compartment was approached with great deference by the Customs

## RHINOCEROS EXPRESS

officials who bowed almost to the ground before the great man. It was the same at every station where we stopped. The native policemen and the entire population of each village marched along to the white carriage to make their humble obeisances. At the larger villages, where the local chief with his army of ragged retainers was waiting for the train, the great man stepped down from the carriage to exchange greetings. Unfortunately I was unable to discover who this Abyssinian was (the European passengers, who might have enlightened me, showed no signs of thawing), but I gathered later that he was one of the Emperor's trusted advisers (there are several hundreds of them).

Soon we were on our way again and for hour after hour the line ran through grey, featureless landscapes, with no living creature, not even a vulture, in sight. We stopped for lunch at a small wayside hut, where we were offered meat which I suspected was hyena, and shared a bottle of chianti with the engine driver. He had been driving the old "Rhinoceros" for fifteen years but he doubted very much whether he would still be driving it in five months' time. I doubted it too.

We were due to arrive at Dirre Dowa at 4.35. For the last three hours of the journey we traversed mile upon mile of flat sandy plains, with thorn and scrub and boulders reaching to the distant mountains. We had climbed to the first plateau and the heat was now bearable. We stopped several times for water, to repair damaged wires, and to scatter goats and camels from the path of the "Rhinoceros". At half-past four the dreary landscape was broken by a line of pink corrugated iron roofs.

Punctually at 4.35 the "Rhinoceros" express drew into Dirre Dowa station. As soon as the train had

come to a standstill a horde of natives besieged the white carriage, clambering through the doors and windows, and before we could resist this surprise assault our bags were snatched down from the racks and my typewriter, camera, and field glasses were seized by grasping black hands. Outside, two Europeans were directing operations, but the commotion on the platform was too great to make out what they were shouting. Our departure from Djibuti was a tame affair compared to this. In honour of the Emperor's visit the station was gaily decorated with red, green, and gold bunting and flags, and the platform was policed by Abyssinian soldiers in loose-fitting khaki tunics, baggy breeches, puttees and bare feet. With difficulty we climbed out of the train and sought the aid of the two Europeans who were waving their arms wildly in the air and shouting directions to the porters who had seized our baggage. These two Europeans—they were both Greeks—were the managers of the two hotels of the town. They had to struggle fiercely for the patronage of visitors. The porters who get your baggage first automatically settle which hotel you must patronize. Before we left Abyssinia we got used to this sort of thing. But I often wondered what happened to those people whose baggage was divided between the two rivals.

In our case M. Bollolakos, of the Grand Hotel Continental was the victor. His manager had heard in some mysterious way of our coming. Although Abyssinia's communications are crude and primitive in the extreme, news sometimes travels with startling rapidity. We were detained for some time by the Customs on account of my typewriter and a tin of 100 cigarettes. On the former (which at first was suspected of being an infernal machine) I had to pay 10s. duty and on the latter 5s., which was nearly double what I

paid for them at Aden. An enterprising Greek has made a "corner" in cigarettes and tobacco in Abyssinia and this heavy duty is imposed on all foreign imports. Our bags were turned inside out and even the lining was tested to see whether we had concealed bombs or ammunition inside.

M. Bollolakos's manager apologized for these delays and difficulties and assured us that the Customs regulations were now very strict and even diplomatic baggage was not immune from this drastic treatment. In view of the Emperor's visit these precautions had been doubled. I was feeling so dirty and tired that I wouldn't have minded much if they had kept all my baggage. At last I was handed a receipt for my typewriter, and my box of cigarettes stamped with the Lion of Judah emblem. Outside the station a guard of honour was drawn up in two long and rather ragged lines, and at first, remembering what I had heard of Abyssinian hospitality, particularly towards Englishmen, I took this for a surprise reception arranged by the authorities at the request of our genial host. It was a pardonable mistake on my part because at the moment that I appeared at the station entrance the two columns of soldiers presented arms and turned their heads in my direction. Almost immediately, however, I found myself being pushed from behind to make way for someone greater than I. It was the new Governor of Harar, who had just arrived from Addis Ababa. He was an imposing-looking man whose name is Ras Nassibu. He was wearing the khaki uniform of an Abyssinian general and with the exception of the Emperor himself was the most impressive-looking Abyssinian I met.

The Grand Hotel Continental, a one-story building consisting of balconies smothered in bougainvillæa, poinsettias, and honeysuckle, with bedrooms opening

on to an inner courtyard, was turned into a temporary barracks on account of the visit of Ras Nassibu. A horde of his retainers and personal bodyguard squatted around the steps and balconies. In the courtyard I nearly stepped in a great pool of blood where a pig had been killed a few minutes before in honour of His Excellency. The manager apologized profusely for not being able to offer me a bath, but there was a serious shortage of water and it was only just possible to collect enough water in the whole town for the Governor's bath.

After dinner I was sent for by Ras Nassibu. He received me in his private dining-room, where empty champagne bottles and the smell of cigars spoke of the warmth of M. Bollolakos's hospitality as well as the appreciation of upper class Abyssinians for Western luxuries. Ras Nassibu spoke in French. He is a man still in his thirties but looks older. He is one of the Emperor's modern-minded young men and his appointment to the Governorship of Harar (previously he was Mayor of Addis Ababa and Governor of Bori) undoubtedly came about because of his knowledge and experience of Italian colonial methods. He displayed great interest in my visit and on behalf of the province of Harar extended me a cordial welcome to Abyssinia. He was very anxious to hear what was being said in England about the crisis. For European news the Abyssinians, even the Emperor himself, have to depend largely on the European newspapers, a month old, and casual visitors. Even the Europeans in Abyssinia mistrust the news bulletins from Rome.

We hoped to leave by bus for Harar early the next morning and I was too tired that night to stroll round Dirre Dowa. In any case there was nothing to see. The town is not thirty years old, and suddenly sprang up with the arrival of the railway. It has a cosmo-

politan population consisting of Greeks, Armenians, Italians, Russians and French, all of whom live under corrugated iron roofs. Its siesta, like Djibuti, is only disturbed by the arrival and departure of the trains. Just now there was still an atmosphere of excitement on account of the Emperor's visit—he had gone to Harar by road the previous day—and the Governor's arrival. But the greatest blessing of all that Dirre Dowa had to offer us was a cool, peaceful night—made doubly secure by the presence of an Abyssinian sentry whom Ras Nassibu had had posted outside my bedroom door all night. It was a gracious gesture.

## CHAPTER XV

### TIME STANDS STILL AT HARAR

THE picturesque way to travel from Dirre Dowa to Harar is, of course, the Biblical way, by mule.

Indeed, until a few years ago this was the only mode of transport between the two towns. It was slow, but fairly certain. Wheeled traffic is always likely to stick fast in the mud, and the thirty-mile journey may then take anything from a day to three days to complete. The Emperor usually leaves the royal train at Dirre Dowa and continues his journey to Harar by air. On this occasion, however, the Royal Family had travelled from Dirre Dowa in two of the imperial Fords, but the journey had taken longer than usual (in spite of the fact that hundreds of road-workers had been busy for days repairing the damaged parts of the road in preparation for the Emperor's visit), and consequently the entire Diplomatic Corps was kept waiting for three hours on the steps of the Coptic cathedral at Harar.

My time being limited and the hour of my audience with the Emperor having been fixed for 9 o'clock on Thursday morning (this was Tuesday), I decided that it would be best not to risk the mule. I was advised by Ras Nassibu to travel by the ordinary bus which, in the dry season, takes three hours. At 9 o'clock we took our places at the side of the driver in a lorry crowded with Abyssinians whose colour varied from pale *café au lait* to ebony, some with refined, others with coarse negroid, features. A remarkable number of people were crowded into an astonishingly small space, and I was a little apprehensive as to how the lorry would stand up to

such a load. We started on our way with a great fanfare of hooters, horns and klaxons, and in a few minutes had left Dirre Dowa behind. Nobody except the driver spoke a word during the entire journey, but once, soon after leaving Dirre Dowa, I succeeded in getting the driver to say one word, and this was "Adowa." We had passed a heap of old cannon rotting and rusting and almost overgrown with weeds. By a process of signals and signs I deduced that these were captured by Menelik at Adowa. I confirmed this story when we reached Harar, but I was told at Addis Ababa that they were not Italian cannon at all, but merely old Austrian guns which Menelik had bought after Adowa when he was reorganizing the army. The story was that the mission which he had sent to Vienna to buy the guns had found other and more exciting ways of spending the Emperor's money, and they bought these worthless antiques with the little money they had left. When they returned with their purchases the Emperor dealt with them in the customary Abyssinian manner.

We had not left Dirre Dowa far behind before we began to climb and the road became steep and dangerous. Our lorry, in spite of its vast load, attacked the bends and sharp inclines with zest—at times I thought a little too much zest. Dust and desolation met the eye above, below and around us. Time and again our way was impeded by huge boulders which had tumbled down the mountain side. Occasionally we passed a small convoy of camels, roped nose to tail, but there was little other sign of life. When we stopped climbing the road was blocked by a corrugated iron gate where we had to pay a toll-fee before we could proceed. We passed six of these toll-bars between Dirre Dowa and Harar. The road itself was much better than I expected, for it had been built twenty-five years ago by Ras Makonnen, the Emperor's father, who was then



## ABYSSINIAN ADVENTURE

**Governor of Harar.** An army of slaves, with primitive implements, had torn this great highway out of the solid mountain sides, and their work stands to-day as a monument to native industry and patience. In the whole of Abyssinia there are only 2,615 miles of roads fit for wheeled traffic, and of this number only 65 miles are macadam.

Presently we left the mountains and, passing through another corrugated iron gateway, a wide green plateau opened up before us. We had left the dust and the desolation and had come upon a land flowing with milk and honey. There were natives toiling at the plough drawn by small oxen, and the low hills were terraced with fields of cotton, a scene which had little changed since the days of the Queen of Sheba. Away to our left a long sheet of water (the first we had seen since Djibuti) shimmered in the sun, and many waterfowl, duck, spoon-bill, coot and small black and white cranes flew above us towards their mountain sanctuary. More than once, as we passed cars stuck deep in the mud, we had occasion to be thankful for Ras Nassibu's advice. The highway, as we approached Harar, was becoming active and at times almost congested. Women, stripped to the waist, staggered along under great loads of wood and fuel, while their lords followed at an easy pace carrying scarlet umbrellas. These women were not beautiful, but fat, greasy and smug. Others had a baby tied on their backs, and they, too, walked with a stoop, to keep the child in an upright position. In Abyssinia the women, as well as the camels and donkeys and mules, are the beasts of burden. Only a few of the young girls, with their hair plaited like the women of Eritrea, were comely and graceful, with refined features and golden-brown complexions.

There were camels and mules and donkeys, beggars, peasants and priests. Sometimes our driver would

## TIME STANDS STILL AT HARAR

have to hoot long and loud before a chief, seated on a diminutive, fussy mule, with his small army of retainers running behind, would make way for us to pass. This is a sight which one meets in no other part of the world. The great man is attired in a short black cloak with a golden chain, and on his head he wears a large grey sombrero. Every young Abyssinian dandy aspires one day to sit like this on a small mule under a large grey sombrero, surrounded by his trotting, perspiring retinue. The little group moves along at a quick pace as if matters of great moment lie ahead, and the ragged escort, carrying their master's gun, shield, sword, and every conceivable household and personal possession, trots and hops in step with the awkward gait of the mule, with one free hand touching some part of the great man's cloak or the saddle or the bridle. Sometimes the little procession encounters another going in the opposite direction. There is a momentary pause while each escort eyes the other. And then having decided which of the great men is greater than the other, by the number of his retinue or the quality of his cloak, the lesser gives way and then the two great men exchange bows.

All roads led to Harar, because the visit of the Emperor meant banquets and feasts, reviews and parades and military and religious celebrations in his honour. At last our silence was broken. Harar appeared below us. At first all we could see was a mass of brown roofs and walls climbing up the side of a hill like a vast rabbit warren. If this was the "ancient jewel" which less than a hundred years ago no Christian dared enter, I felt that we were going to be disappointed. Away to the back of the town the Mountain of Refuge rose grim and forbidding. No European has seen the top of that mountain.

In a few minutes we were descending the hill to the town. Outside the walls we passed the parade

ground where raw Abyssinian recruits were being ordered to "try their other right" by Belgian sergeant-majors, and presently we were passing the Emperor's new palace. Opposite the palace a row of low stone huts huddled closely together. A red cross painted on dirty curtains screened the interiors from our view. These were the combined *tedj* houses and brothels which are seen everywhere in Abyssinia.

At the gates of the town we were challenged by a sentry whose slumbers had been disturbed by the noise of our hooters, scattering the peasants and soldiers and camp followers who poured down the hill into Harar. He looked at Evans and myself and then whispered something to the driver. We had to present our passports. The formalities were brief and soon we were threading our way slowly along Harar's only thoroughfare fit for wheeled traffic. That first drive through Harar was like turning over the pages of the "Arabian Nights." Here time has stood still for 800 years. The houses are without windows and many are in ruins, or patched up with old petrol tins. Deep ruts and hollows make progress slow and dangerous even in the main street. An astonishing human tapestry unfolded itself as we approached the market square. The peasants who had just arrived from the surrounding country gazed vacantly at all around them, while the townspeople eyed suspiciously the presence of strange Europeans in their midst. Every race and creed seemed to be represented here—Somalis, Gallas, Arabs, Egyptians, Danakils, Indians, Greeks and Armenians. The natives call themselves Harari and they speak a language of their own. Loafers, beggars, lepers, harlots, prisoners chained together, ragged warriors, nobles, wise elders and priests, Belgian army officers, French monks, the halt and the blind, it was a strange cavalcade we saw as we passed under cardboard triumphal arches with

the words "Welcome to Haile Selassie" crudely sprawled above, on our way through Harar. There is nothing else like this in the whole of Africa.

At the market square we were handed over to the Customs officials,\* who displayed the usual curiosity over my typewriter and camera. Again I had to pay 10s. for the former, and our cases were turned inside out in search of firearms. Their inspection is so thorough that even the new first Secretary to the British Legation at Addis Ababa had his diplomatic bags searched at Harar on the day after our arrival. There is only one hotel in Harar fit for Europeans, the Imperatrice, and there we made our headquarters during our week's stay. The new English Vice-Consul, Chapman Andrews, and his wife and small son had recently arrived, and were in process of unpacking blankets (you need them at 6,000 feet even in the summer) when we made ourselves known at the Consulate. They live in a house which belongs to the Emperor two miles outside the town (all the Consulates for sanitary as well as other reasons lie outside Harar), and it was here that Ras Makonnen himself lived for many years. The garden is full of English flowers, and every day while the Court is at Harar Mrs. Chapman Andrews sends large bunches of roses, at the Emperor's request, to the Palace.

With the exception of the members of the Belgian Military Mission, Chapman Andrews is the busiest of the 50 Europeans who live at Harar. Although he and his wife are the only English people between here and Addis Ababa there are several hundred British subjects, Indian merchants for the most part, who live in and around Harar. Mohammed Aly, of course, is here and does a thriving business in Japanese fabrics, in which nearly all the Harari women are dressed. The Japanese trade "invasion" of Abyssinia is only equalled by the non-political, non-trade "invasion" of the Swedes. You

find these Swedes working silently and inconspicuously all over Abyssinia as doctors, missionaries, engineers and farmers. This "invasion" has only taken place during the last few years, and their position in the country has been greatly consolidated since the visit of the Crown Prince and his family a year ago. The Emperor regarded this occasion as worthy of special recognition, and built an entirely new palace on European lines at Addis Ababa to accommodate his distinguished visitors. The palace and its fittings cost £75,000, and all the furnishings were carried out by an Oxford Street firm.

It was the Swedish Mission at Harar that supplied me with my trusted and faithful Abyssinian servant, who rejoiced in the high-sounding surname of Makonnen. His bearing was so aristocratic that I immediately christened him "Ras" Makonnen. I don't think he quite appreciated my attempt at humour. Although it is customary to swear in the name of Haile Selassie (as they still do in the name of Menelik) no doubt he thought it a little irreverent of me to address him in the name of the Emperor's father. "Ras" Makonnen was "about" 18 (no Abyssinian knows his exact age), spoke English almost perfectly, dreaded the thought of having to join the army, and insisted on sleeping outside my bedroom door wherever we went in Abyssinia. He became so attached to us that when we returned to Djibuti on our way home (and "Ras" saw the sea for the first time) he went down on his knees and begged me to take him to Europe.

Our first night we wandered round the deserted streets of Harar. It was an eerie experience, and I know of no other place where one can so completely feel the silence as there. The gates of the town are closed at eight, and after the curfew the 30,000 inhabitants disappear into their rabbit-warren hovels until five o'clock the next morning. By nine at night the whole town is asleep,

and any native found abroad at that hour is promptly arrested. Even the *tedj* bars have closed their curtains for the night and the last sounds of revelry have died away. The only lights are those that twinkle on the round tower of the Palace and the undarkened windows show that the Emperor works while his subjects slumber peacefully below. It is very easy to get lost in the labyrinth of alleys, courtyards, tunnels and caves with which Harar is honeycombed. It is easier still to sprain your ankle or break your leg in the pits and trenches and open drains with which the streets are paved. Most of these "streets" are only wide enough for three people to walk abreast.

Harar has no sanitary system, and the householders, instead of placing their refuse in the dustbin to be collected in the morning, throw their rubbish in a heap outside their front doors. After dusk the scavengers appear, their green eyes shining with a sinister light through the blackness, and in the morning the streets are clean. The hyenas have their mission after all. After dusk they creep through the holes in the town walls, and more than once when we were returning late from dining at the Legations outside the town we confronted these loathsome beasts performing their nightly duties. Nobody thinks of shooting them, unless, as very rarely happens, they show signs of attack. The hyena way of hygiene is not always effective, however, for Harar has been devastated on many occasions by cholera which has reduced the townspeople, they say, to eating their own children to escape starvation.

One of the minor problems of life in Abyssinia is the difficulty of carrying money about with you. The Abyssinian coinage is still the Marie Thérèse dollar, and as this coin is nearly as large as a five-shilling piece, and outside Addis Ababa and Dirre Dowa the notes issued by the Bank of Ethiopia are not accepted, the problem

of carrying supplies is a serious one. If one is setting forth on a journey of several weeks into the interior it is necessary to carry large sacks of dollars for current expenses. Even for a comparatively brief visit like my own I had to take a canvas bag filled with these picturesque coins.

They are still minted in Vienna from the original 1780 die, and Menelik's attempt after Adowa to introduce a new coin bearing his own head proved abortive. The natives thought the new coins were counterfeit. A hundred years ago the Marie Thérèse dollar was accepted from Morocco to China, but to-day it only survives in Abyssinia and Arabia. The Bank of Ethiopia also issue nickel coins, but these are not always accepted even in Addis Ababa. The most universally accepted coin in Haile Selassie's realm is, however, the cartridge. It is valued at two piastres.

Harar is a city of strange contrasts and rude surprises. At the back of the Hotel Imperatrice there is a prison. My bedroom balcony overlooked the prison yard where the prisoners assembled two or three times a day. They were manacled in pairs, at the wrist and ankle. Most of them had been convicted of petty thefts and swindles. They were not fed or clothed by the authorities, and unless their relatives or friends brought them food and water they were left to starve. On several occasions I threw packets of cigarettes down to them, and each time a stalwart warder beat the poor wretches away with a hippopotamus whip. Around the prison yard there were high fences of barbed wire, and the hovels where the prisoners slept (I obtained permission to see these) were indescribably filthy and verminous.

I mentioned these things to Ato Lorenzo Taczaz, Political Director of the Province of Harar, who acted as my interpreter when I was received by the Emperor,



Prisoners in chains at Harar





Capital punishment at Addis Ababa

and he said, "If we tried to apply European standards of justice here, crime would enormously increase. We have done away with the more brutal forms of punishment, such as cutting off the right hand and the left foot, and public executions, but if we were lenient in our sentences on criminals many of them would become habitual murderers, thieves and liars. By making an example of them they realize that the Emperor is both strong and just, and the severe punishments deter the others."

One afternoon soon after our arrival in Harar I was disturbed by loud shouting coming from the other side of the hotel. Above the clamour I could hear the name of Haile Selassie being repeatedly and dramatically proclaimed. I asked one of the Greeks who was sipping *apéritifs* outside the hotel what this commotion meant. He pointed in the direction of the building opposite, above which appeared the word "Municipalité". The Court of Justice was sitting. I strolled across and entered a gate which gave on to a small courtyard. A strange scene greeted me. Two men in white *chammas* were dancing and stamping and making frenzied gesticulations. Before them, in solemn array, sat a dozen or more elders who listened intently and made occasional notes on small sheets of paper. Behind the two principal actors in this quaint drama stood the plaintiff and the accused. There were no Europeans in this remarkable gathering, and most of my companions were prisoners with manacled wrists and ankles. Not once throughout the entire proceedings did either the plaintiff, a woman with a baby on her back (flies were crawling all over the child's sore face) or the accused, a short, thick-set negroid type of Abyssinian, utter a single word. But their silence was more than made up for by the volubility of the counsels for the defence and the prosecution, who vied with each other in theatrical

wavings of the arms and stamping movements with their feet. At the end of their impassioned orations (freely interspersed with the name of the Emperor to emphasize a particular point), each would gather his *chamma* around him and throw the ends over his shoulder, as proud as a Roman. There were moments, however, when one did not wait for the other to finish and the noise then became impossible. Only then would one of the elders intervene and order would be quickly restored. A few minutes later and the whole comedy would be re-enacted until silence was once more restored. Eventually some kind of decision was reached and the thick-set Abyssinian handed over a bunch of coins to the woman with the baby.

While I was in Abyssinia I saw many sights like this. The wayside courts are a feature of the country and date back to the dim ages. Although justice is primitively administered (anybody can be called in, while walking along the street, to settle a dispute), it is usually fairly effective. In some of these zinc wayside huts in the towns there are judges in constant attendance who, for a small fee, administer the law of the country. In the case of debtor and creditor the former is frequently sentenced to be chained to the latter until the debt has been discharged. This may mean months, even years, in which the two are never out of each other's sight. One came across these incongruous couples in the cafés, along the roads, in the markets, and even in the train. They were usually smiling and perfectly friendly. Any other relationship in such circumstances would obviously have been very difficult. But I heard it said that it not infrequently happened that the debtor, after his last "account rendered" had been settled, implored his creditor to retain him in his service.

I was beginning to like Abyssinia and the Abyssinians.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE KING OF KINGS

THE first time I saw the Emperor Haile Selassie was in London, ten years ago. He was then, of course, Ras Tafari and Regent of Abyssinia. I caught a fleeting glimpse of a little man with a black beard and kind, expressive eyes, coming out of a large house in Knightsbridge. He was surrounded by flunkies in gorgeous silk uniforms, one of whom, although it was a grey London day, held a scarlet-and-gold umbrella over his head. He was making the Grand European tour beloved of Eastern and near-Eastern potentates, and provided a two days' wonder for the illustrated papers. I did not expect to see or hear about Ras Tafari again, and I certainly could not put my finger on Abyssinia on the map of Africa.

The next time I saw the little man with the black beard was under very different circumstances and in a setting far removed from Knightsbridge. There were no flunkies and there was no scarlet umbrella. He was sitting in a Ford which was making its way slowly and a little incongruously through a coffee plantation on the outskirts of Harar. Nobody knew that he was coming that afternoon, and no preparations had been made for his reception. Purely by accident I was trudging with Chapman Andrews up the hills at the back of the Consulate and we found ourselves in the plantation. Without warning the royal car, flying the Ethiopian flag, came slowly round a bend of the track. As he passed, the Emperor, who was accompanied by his second son, the fourteen-year-old Duke of Harar, bowed and smiled

towards Chapman Andrews and myself. I shall always remember that chance glimpse of this remarkable and most likeable man. It made me wonder at the time how Mussolini would have behaved had he, instead of Haile Selassie, been sitting in the Ford and chanced upon two obscure Englishmen tramping through the wilds.

When I presented myself for my first audience with the Lion of Judah at the new Palace at nine o'clock the next morning, I felt that I had known him for a long time. I had read much about him, and Ato Lorenzo Taezaz, an Eritrean who enjoys the Emperor's closest confidence, had talked to me at great length about him. These Abyssinians have a profound devotion for their Emperor, and this feeling is shared not only by those who are in close contact with him and uphold his views, but also by the illiterate natives who have never seen him. The prestige of Menelik was great indeed, but the name of Haile Selassie, with no outstanding victory yet to his name, will, I believe, shine in history, no matter what the future holds in store, more brightly than the victor of Adowa. His task has been immeasurably more difficult than Menelik's. He has had to subdue not only a former Emperor, Lej Yasu, and a host of jealous Rases, but, like Henry II, he has had an all-powerful priesthood with which to contend, and now, when the first fruits of his labours are almost in view, he has come face to face with the strongest military figure since Napoleon.

Whatever one's political views in the present crisis may be, one cannot but feel sorry for this lonely, romantic figure. He is lonely because, intellectually, he towers head and shoulders above all those around him. He is the only man in Abyssinia who burns the midnight oil and has already done three hours' work when he holds his first audience at 9 a.m. He is terribly

overworked, and people say that unless he relaxes he will have a serious breakdown. He looks tired and he looks worried. No man could labour as he does and not show signs of strain and anxiety. He has been criticized for not delegating more of the affairs of State to his subordinates. They say that no detail is too insignificant for the Emperor to attend to personally, and to illustrate this point they recall that when a new doorkeeper was needed recently for the Foreign Office at Addis Ababa it was the Emperor who interviewed and selected the man for the post.

It is easy to understand Haile Selassie's anxiety to keep in touch with all that is going on around him because there are many spies and petty jealousies at work in the Palace. Sometimes, they say, he ventures forth from the Palace disguised as a man of the people to see for himself how his reforms are being carried out and what the Man in the Street is saying. On one such occasion, so the story goes, he was unable to convince his own sentries at the Palace of his identity, and he found three of the gates barred against him. At the fourth gate, however, he persuaded the guard to let him enter. The next morning the three sentries who had stopped him were decorated, and the one who had allowed him to enter was ordered to be confined to barracks. No doubt the originator of this picturesque story had been reading about Haroun-al-Raschid, but it is typical of the many Arabian Nights legends circulating in Addis Ababa and Harar.

The career of the former Ras Tafari has been a remarkable one. When he was born forty-four or five years ago (even the Emperor himself does not know his exact age) there was very little prospect of his ascending the throne of Solomon. He had been called Tafari, meaning "Without Fear," in accordance with the Abyssinian custom of naming a child by the first words

spoken by the mother after its birth. Menelik had two daughters, and one of these daughters had a son, Lej Yasu. Ras Tafari's hereditary claims were very slender indeed. His father, Ras Makonnen, a nephew of Menelik, had established a powerful position for himself in the country and had added the rich province of Harar to the Empire of the King of Kings. Menelik appointed him Regent while he himself was away at the Italian wars. The young Tafari, the only one of eleven children to survive infancy, often played in the grounds of Gibbi, the Imperial Palace at Addis Ababa, with Lej Yasu. Menelik liked both of the boys, but he had chosen Lej Yasu, his grandson, as his successor.

But the fates have always been on the side of Haile Selassie. At the age of 22 he was the only one of a party of seven to escape drowning in a boating accident on Lake Harramaya. His father had given him a sound European education, under the famous Monsignor Jerome, Bishop of Harar, and although he realized that there was no possibility of seizing the throne for himself, he had high hopes that his son would one day be strong enough to do so. At 17 Ras Tafari was appointed Governor of the Province of Sidamo, in Southern Abyssinia. The young Lej Yasu was now on the throne and already showed signs of squandering away the heritage of his grandfather. He had turned Mohammedan, had sided with the Mad Mullah, and in the Great War was making overtures to Germany.

Ras Tafari abided his time. When the moment came Lej Yasu was deposed by the combined efforts of the Rases, and Zauditu, Menelik's second daughter, was crowned Queen of Kings with Ras Tafari as Regent. The Empress Zauditu, remembered to-day only by her magnificent motor-car which the Emperor has presented to the Ethiopian Red Cross, found that her religious duties prevented her from attending to the

affairs of State. Gradually the reins of Government fell into the hands of Ras Tafari. In a few years he had consolidated his position so securely that he had himself crowned *Negus*, or King. But there were still difficulties in his path, and in the spring of 1930 he was faced with the rebellion of the powerful Ras Gousa, the divorced husband of the Empress Zauditu. The *Negus* was victorious, Ras Gousa was killed, and the following day the Empress herself died suddenly after taking a cold bath. Shortly afterwards, with a great display of pomp and splendour, and in the presence of the third son of the King of England, the *Negus* was crowned *Negus Nagasti* and took the name of Haile Selassie, meaning Power of the Trinity. It was the culmination of Ras Makonnen's well-ordered and carefully designed strategy.

Meanwhile, the Emperor turned his eyes towards Europe, for he saw that it was from there that danger would one day come. He had finished with civil wars. Ras Hailu, the Governor of Gojam, had been deposed, and thereby the way to peace in Northern Ethiopia had been paved. The death of Sultan Aba Jifar, the Moslem ruler of the rich province of Jimma, inhabited by Moslem Gallas, removed yet another obstacle from the Emperor's path, and he was thereby able to bring under his personal control a region in the west which had too long enjoyed an unsavoury reputation for slave-trading. In the South and East, along that two-thousand-mile strip of Italian, English and French territory which cuts Abyssinia off from the sea, there were still difficult tribes to be brought under the control of Addis Ababa. But the sands of Wal Wal, the Emperor reflected, had been a source of trouble to someone since the days of Abraham, and these things could not be changed in a day.

Haile Selassie had two reasons for turning towards



Europe. He wanted to impress the people at home with the importance of Abyssinia in the eyes of the world and his own prestige abroad, and at the same time to ensure Abyssinia's place in the sunshine of civilized nations. The former he achieved by a well-thought-out plan in the years preparatory to his ascending the throne of Solomon. There was, firstly, the European tour. He brought home with him signed portraits of the King and Queen of England, two pet spaniels from the King of Italy, and a host of gifts from rulers and dictators with whom it would be well to keep friendly in the coming years. Europe, it must be remembered, had not taken Abyssinia seriously since the days of Menelik. In Ras Tafari they beheld not a "dusky monarch" as they expected, but an enlightened ruler who was proceeding about the reforms of his feudal empire in a manner that commanded admiration and respect. When Ras Tafari became Haile Selassie I, Europe sent representatives of every nation, including two Royal Princes, to his coronation, and the Abyssinians were well pleased at this signal recognition of their importance. But Haile Selassie's most brilliant move (which may yet prove to be his greatest mistake) was the admission of Abyssinia to the League of Nations. It is strange to think to-day that it was England who opposed and Italy who supported her admission.

At home the Emperor proceeded with his reforms with great care and restraint. There was no hurry. He was not going to make the mistakes of Amanullah. He gathered around him a band of young men (several of whom he had sent to Europe to study European methods of administration) who saw eye to eye with him about the new Abyssinia. He appointed Governors in the Provinces from whom the local Rases would have to take their orders. He established a Parliament, a bank, schools and hospitals, he built roads and wireless

stations, he came to serious grips with the slavery question, he improved the system of taxation, and he sought the best advice of Europe and America in all those things which he, an African, did not understand.

People who, like Dr. Martin, the Ethiopian Minister in London, have only revisited Abyssinia once or twice during the last thirty years, are amazed at the progress of modern Ethiopia. That this has come about through the efforts and wisdom of one man who is only a few years over forty is all the more astonishing. It is not surprising, therefore, that to-day he looks tired and anxious. But in spite of the immense amount of organization which he has had to personally supervise during the last six months he is still the easiest man to see in Abyssinia. He is always pleased to see foreign journalists, even though, as in my case, they do not represent newspapers who support the Abyssinian cause. That he is well informed of Press views in Europe and America is indicated by the fact that he is supplied with a complete set of foreign newspaper cuttings each month.

My audience, as I have said, was fixed for nine o'clock at the new Palace at Harar. Ato Lorenzo Taczaz and Chapman Andrews (and Evans with camera) accompanied me to the Emperor's imposing new home overlooking Harar, where we arrived ten minutes before the appointed time. It is considered etiquette to wear morning coat and top hat on these occasions, as well as to bring presents (usually in the shape of guns and swords) for the Conquering Lion of Judah. At Addis Ababa the Emperor has rooms filled with these presents, which range from gold-plated refrigerators to diamond-encrusted fountain pens. I had neither top hat nor presents. But the Emperor, as I have tried to indicate, is a wise man, and he recognizes that a thousand words in a foreign newspaper about Abyssinia and its Emperor (he knows, too, that the Abyssinian telegrams are the

most expensive in the world) is worth a good many rifles and swords. What did it matter, either, if journalists wrote bad things about Abyssinia so long as they wrote about *Abyssinia*?

At the entrance to the Palace we were received by footmen in scarlet coats and bare feet, who conducted us to the apartments of the Emperor's private secretary. That gentleman, whose name I could not catch, conducted us in turn up a flight of stairs to a wide balcony which practically encircles the first floor of the Palace. A group of courtiers and equerries were lounging lazily on this balcony and conversing in whispers. We turned through some french windows into a large dim room, and at first I did not realize that there was anybody in the room. Chapman Andrews preceded me and advanced slowly, with a succession of deep bows, to the far end of the room. I then realized that we were in the presence of the King of Kings, and I followed closely behind Chapman Andrews and bowed low over the Emperor's hand.

Haile Selassie was sitting on a small gilt throne on a raised dais and was wearing the conventional black silk cape with golden chain. The Throne Room was practically bare of furniture or decoration, and the only pictures were two large portraits of the Emperor's mother and father. In his left hand he held a small ivory-handled fly-whisk, and at his feet played two tiny white spaniels. My first impression of Haile Selassie was that of a man of great calm, of indomitable pride and pathetic sadness. His gentle features suggested more the prophet than the great military and political leader. I realized, too, how misleading and inaccurate are the descriptions I had read of Abyssinia's "Black Emperor". Haile Selassie is not black at all. I have seen Englishmen returning from the Riviera with a deeper tan than the King of Kings. The features are

Semitic and there is no suggestion of the negroid about his face or his hands. The latter are small and finely modelled and are used for graceful gesticulation while the Emperor is talking. They are more the hands of an artist or dreamer than of a man of practical affairs, although the handshake is firm and almost Western in its welcome.

The Emperor motioned me to a chair on his left, and Ato Lorenzo Taezaz, who acted as interpreter, handed a list of questions to the Emperor, written in Amharic, which we had prepared, at His Majesty's request, the previous evening. The Emperor had already read through these questions and immediately proceeded to the official business of the audience. He spoke softly, looking neither right nor left, but keeping his gaze directed in front of him, where, through the open french windows, he could see across to the hills where his recruits were being drilled by Belgian officers. He was speaking in Amharic, and at the end of each statement Ato Taezaz translated the Emperor's words into French. The Emperor indicated that he would not mind if I made notes of what he said. At first he spoke slowly and frequently referred to the list of questions, but presently, tiring of the slow process of having his words translated into French, he abandoned this plan and continued talking in Amharic, turning from time to time to emphasize a point to Ato Lorenzo Taezaz.

While the Emperor was talking, the two white spaniels played at the foot of the throne, and a swarm of flies descended upon us. The Emperor, with a few graceful sweeps of his fly-whisk, succeeded in keeping the attackers at a respectful distance, but I was not so successful with my bare hand and a handkerchief. The Emperor, noticing my discomfiture, motioned to Taezaz, who in turn summoned a servant waiting within call. He reappeared almost immediately with a magnificent

gold-handled fly-whisk, on which the Imperial Crown and Lion of Judah were embossed.

We had been listening to the Emperor for over an hour when His Majesty stood up and indicated that the official part of the audience was at an end. For the first time I noticed how very small and frail Haile Selassie looks. He is not more than five feet five inches in height. He came up to me and began to bombard me with questions in French, glad, it seemed, that he could turn his mind to less grave affairs for a few minutes. How old was I? How long had I been in Abyssinia? How did I like Harar? Was I comfortable at the hotel? Was I being shown everything I wanted by Ato Lorenzo Taczaz? Was I going to Addis Ababa? Would I dine with him and the Empress on Saturday at eight? What did they say about Abyssinia in London? How many readers had the *Daily Mail* and why was it so much in favour of Mussolini's policy? Did I like dogs? Had I seen any like his? Would I like to take some photographs?

I answered this bewildering succession of questions as best I could. We strolled out to the balcony, and as we approached the little group of whispering courtiers and flunkies they withdrew backwards to a respectful distance. The Emperor asked me how I liked the new Palace and he pointed out the ideas that he had for laying out the gardens which at present were little more than barren patches of clay. As we talked two of His Majesty's attendants held a scarlet-and-gold umbrella over our heads, and whisked away the flies which continued to show no respect for the Elect of God or for me. Presently Ato Lorenzo Taczaz approached and said something in Amharic to the Emperor. Haile Selassie then turned to me and said, "I hear you have brought a companion with you. He is down-

stairs and I would like him to come up to be presented and to take some photographs."

I remembered suddenly that Evans was wearing grey flannel trousers and a sports coat, but nothing could be done now and a moment later his surprised face appeared at the top of the stairs. I hurriedly indicated to him to bow three times very low, so that the Emperor could see the back of his neck, but my instructions fell on deaf ears. It was obvious that Evans was far more used to the company of crowned heads than I. His obeisances were superb, his manner that of a *beau* of the eighteenth century. The Emperor was charmed. He posed for several pictures, talked to Evans, signed his autograph album and ended by asking him to come to dinner too.

We had been over an hour and a half in the Emperor's company and a sign from Ato Lorenzo Taezaz indicated that the time had come for us to withdraw. The Emperor said that he hoped to see more of us while we were at Harar, and that if there was anything I needed I had only to communicate my wishes to him and they would be immediately granted. I thanked His Majesty profoundly and withdrew from the presence walking backwards, a delicate operation which I was thankful that I had rehearsed beforehand.

Ato Lorenzo Taezaz took us back to his house, and gave me a verbatim translation of the Emperor's words. I will set down the Emperor's statement exactly as it was given to me. "The so-called precautionary measures taken by Italy conceal an obvious intention to invade my country. In view of my own repeated attempts to refer the frontier disputes to neutral arbitration, I feel that the bellicose attitude of Italy threatens not only my peace but the peace of the whole world. The League of Nations, in which I

have placed and still place unbounded confidence, should take effective and immediate measures to check the aggressor. From the beginning I have tried to submit the dispute to neutral arbitration. The Italians at first refused, but subsequently, under pressure from the League, they agreed to create a neutral zone preparatory to a fair delimitation of the frontier. They have, however, constantly postponed taking steps to carry this into effect, and at the same time have continued to mobilize and arm on a vast scale.

"Italy has consistently spread lying and misleading reports about Ethiopia, which the representatives of the Foreign Powers here can readily deny. She alleges that, in the event of war, the Moslem section of the population, which outnumbers the Christians, would rise against me. Furthermore she has tried to embroil Great Britain and France against me by saying that I am endeavouring to recruit my forces from among the Moslem element in British, Italian and French territory. This is an outrageous lie. On the other hand the Italians are carrying on a policy of pinpricks on our borders by attempting to subvert my Moslem subjects and cause an incident calling for Italian intervention. They allege, moreover, that slavery is still permitted in Ethiopia, and that we are acting in an aggressive and provocative manner generally. They say that if we as a nation are allowed to survive, the result will be damaging to European prestige in Africa. This is clearly ridiculous to anyone who is closely acquainted with the situation.

"They allege that I have partly mobilized my forces and placed responsible leaders with troops along the frontier. This is another gross lie. After the Wal Wal incident, which was an act of deliberate aggression on territory long since acknowledged to be Ethiopian, the Italian Government immediately

## THE KING OF KINGS

rejected my proposal that the matter should be submitted to arbitration, and demanded a heavy indemnity and that we should salute the Italian flag. This amounted to an admission of guilt on Italy's part. In the event of further frontier incidents, and in view of the Italian mobilization and arming, while we have steadfastly avoided taking any defensive steps that might be misinterpreted, we shall feel compelled in the last measure to defend our frontiers. Let it be remembered, too, that in the event of foreign invasion we would immediately mobilize to the utmost of our capacity, and, though it may surprise the Italians, we should unquestionably have a united Ethiopia to resist the invaders, even as our great forebear Menelik had at Adowa.

"It pains and surprises me that, in view of the Kellogg Pact of 1928 and the Treaty of 1930 prohibiting the import of arms into Ethiopia, the Great Powers stand by and watch Italy's open arming on a scale quite incompatible with 'defensive measures.' I can only conclude that Great Britain, France and Italy have come to a tacit understanding concerning the future of Ethiopia. I shall welcome the establishment of a neutral commission to settle this grave problem, and I look to Great Britain and other disinterested members of the League to ensure that such an arrangement shall be made to prevent war. Three months ago I said to Sir Sidney Barton, the British Minister at Addis Ababa, that I would especially welcome any arrangement whereby British troops from Somaliland could police the disputed area until the frontier had been delimited. I hope this suggestion may yet be adopted. My relations with the British authorities have always been friendly, and I feel that the peaceful methods recently adopted to fix in detail the line of the British frontier can be applied in the case of Italy."



After reading through the Emperor's statement I referred to my list of questions which had been presented, with my humble duty, to His Majesty the evening before my audience. There were only two questions which had not been answered. These were : "In the event of a general mobilization, how many men can your Majesty depend upon to take the field against Italy?" And the other : "Is your Majesty looking for the support of Great Britain in the event of war being declared?"

I read through my list of questions again and wondered what my fate would have been had I dared present a similar list to His Excellency the Governor of Italian Somaliland.

## CHAPTER XVII

### L'ETHIOPIE NE SOUFFRIRA AUCUNE INJUSTICE

THERE was great excitement at the Harar Wireless Station when I presented my telegram describing my interview with the Emperor. It ran to nearly two thousand words, and, although Addis Ababa was more used to this kind of thing (they had not forgotten the plague of Special Correspondents at the Coronation), Harar had not heard of messages of more than a few hundred words. When I informed the chief operator that the message would be paid for on delivery in London, he eyed me with grave suspicion. Eventually I had to summon the aid of Ato Lorenzo Taezaz. The operator's manner immediately changed. He regarded me after that as a very great journalist indeed, and when I handed him further telegrams he received me with the utmost deference.

My telegrams arrived in London within three hours. The replies sometimes took less time than that. It reflected great credit on the Abyssinians, in view of the fact that the three wireless stations of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Harar and Gondar, are operated without any European help. At Mogadiscio some of my telegrams took ten days in coming from London. I had heard that there was some form of censorship in force at Harar and it appeared that the Emperor himself filled the rôle of censor. An instance of this came when I sent a telegram describing a visit I paid to the old ammunition magazine at Harar. I had been shown some rifles which had been captured at Adowa. They were going to be used again

in the coming conflict if suitable ammunition could be obtained. I mentioned this picturesque point in my telegram. An hour later I was summoned to the Palace. The Emperor received me in his study. He had with him a tall robed figure whom I took at first to be a woman, for the voice was pitched too high for a man. I was told later that this was the Emperor's confessor and that he was a eunuch. A great numbers of the priests and monks of Abyssinia, I learned, are eunuchs.

The Emperor spoke in French and said : "I want to ask you if you would leave out the paragraph in your telegram to-day referring to the Italian rifles. At the present time I am most anxious to avoid any appearance of aggressiveness : or to say anything that might inflame Italian feeling. I feel sure that you will co-operate with me in this during your stay in my country. I do not mind if journalists say things unfavourable to my country, they may say what they please, but I do ask them to exercise discretion and to discredit the absurd rumours which I see being printed in the European Press. If there is anything you want to see you have only to ask me. To-morrow I am holding a review of the infantry trained by my Belgian officers and I would like you to accompany me."

I liked the frank way the Emperor spoke and I immediately acceded to his request and accepted his invitation. The following morning at eight o'clock I made my way out in Harar's one and only taxi (belonging to the pre-Flood era) to the Parade Ground, a mile outside the town. In view of the trouble which that taxi caused me after I had left Harar and the fact that it invariably broke down on the slightest incline, it would have been much better if I had travelled about on a mule, with Evans and "Ras" Makonnen, shouldering my rifle and sword, trotting and panting at my

side. An immense crowd of people were making their way to the parade ground and their white cotton *chammas* lent an almost Roman aspect to the scene.

When we eventually arrived I had some difficulty in locating the Emperor's *entourage*, but as usual, the scarlet umbrella directed me to the spot. The Emperor was there already, wearing his new uniform of a Field-Marshal, and he had with him his second son, the Duke of Harar, a diminutive figure (*l'enfant adorable* as they call him), wearing the new uniform of a General, designed by an Abyssinian artist and made in Savile Row. This consisted of a green tunic with gold braid in profusion, lion's mane epaulettes and cuffs, beige-coloured breeches, doe-skin top-boots and gold spurs. The boy obviously enjoyed this playing at soldiers as much as playing at being a King, a game which his father has encouraged by presenting him with a special crown to wear on State occasions.

I apologized to the Emperor for being a few minutes late and, after being reproved by His Majesty for keeping my head uncovered in the sun, I was introduced to the Duke of Harar. I found this lad remarkably bright and intelligent for a boy of 14 and he spoke French fluently. The Emperor was delighted to see his son talking to the members of the royal circle, Ministers of State, high priests, Governors of Provinces and Court Chamberlains, with a natural dignity and not a trace of precociousness. It is generally accepted in Abyssinia that the Emperor is training his second son to carry on the great work which he himself has begun. With the Crown Prince Asfou Wossen the Emperor does not always see eye to eye. At that time he was living in virtual banishment as Governor of the remote province of Dessye, where the Emperor's spies kept him informed of his eldest son's movements. The Duke of Harar (the title had been conferred upon him on his fourteenth

birthday) is being educated by a retired French naval officer, Commandant Henri Cigli, who told me that his charge was very advanced intellectually for his age and that his main difficulty was in keeping him *away* from his studies. The boy's high ambitions have been carefully cultivated by his father, and the time will come, unless the Fates decree otherwise, when the Crown Prince may have to fight for his right to the throne of Solomon. In Abyssinia it is the strongest who wins, and this intelligent boy has already read about the Napoleonic wars and prefers drilling to algebra. His chief hobbies are fencing, shooting and riding, and he has some beautiful Arab horses presented to him by his father. He displayed great interest in my trip and was especially anxious to hear about the Italian preparations at Massowah and Mogadiscio. "We shall fight to the last man," the Boy who would be King informed me. "The Emperor"—he turned with a smile to his father, who was listening with evident pride at his son's words—"won't allow me to go to the front," he continued, "but I know when the time comes I shall be able to persuade him. I am the head of the Province of Harar and my place will be with my soldiers."

The Emperor motioned to the boy and said something to him in Amharic. The Duke of Harar then turned to me and said that he hoped that I would go to see him at his castle when he returned to Addis Ababa. One of the Belgian officers had now approached the royal circle and was informing His Majesty that the review was about to begin. On the parade ground there were less than four hundred soldiers, divided into little groups. Immediately in front of the Emperor a picked troop of the Imperial Guard was lined up who, six weeks before, were raw peasants, but were now "passing out". They were wearing secondhand American uniforms, which were far too thick for

Abyssinian conditions. These experts gave a demonstration of elementary rifle drill, bayonet practice and Lewis gun stripping. The Emperor watched this performance without saying a word either to his son or to Commandant André Listray, Head of the Belgian Military Mission at Harar. From time to time he raised his field-glasses to watch the movements of recruits at the far end of the parade-ground. The review lasted for nearly an hour and the tenseness was relieved only once when one of the Emperor's white spaniels dashed out to the centre of the parade-ground to chase away an infidel hound, three times its own size, which had ventured too close to the sacred person of the Emperor. Flunkies were sent off in hot pursuit, but the Emperor's dog refused to return until the enemy had been routed and chased well out of the Imperial sight. The Emperor smiled and watched the incident through his field-glasses, while members of the crowd joined in the chase.

At the conclusion of the review, the Emperor invited me to accompany him to an inspection of the new military equipment buildings. These consisted of a few corrugated iron sheds which contained supplies of khaki tunics (still bearing the brass buttons of an American State), modern Swiss .303 rifles, pom-poms and maxim guns. The Emperor inspected the equipment closely and spent some minutes discussing the quality and thickness of the American tunics. From there we motored in a long procession, headed by the Emperor and his son in an open Ford, to the headquarters of the Harar Cavalry and Camel Corps. We saw a number of splendid Arab horses, some rather seedy-looking mules and a few strong-smelling camels. The Emperor was now getting a little tired and, after inspecting the headquarters of the Belgian Military Mission, drove off at a great pace to the Palace, followed

by a shouting mob which kept in the wake of the royal car until it reached its destination.

Very early the following morning I received a message from Ato Lorenzo Taezaz to say that the Emperor would like me to accompany him to another review, this time of the Cavalry, which would take place at seven o'clock that morning at the Aviation Field, five miles outside the town. It was a desperately early hour to go out there and would necessitate our starting not later than six o'clock, to ensure our arrival on time. Our Armenian driver assured us, however, that he could accomplish the five miles in half an hour, but, knowing the temperamental fits to which his ancient steed was susceptible, I decided that we should start at six. We arrived at the Aviation Field at seven. By eight there was still no sign of the Emperor. A handful of native soldiers were posted around a bare stretch of country which reminded one of Dartmoor and was about as suitable as the latter for landing and taking-off purposes.

It was nine o'clock before Ato Lorenzo Taezaz appeared, but there was still no sign of the Emperor or of the Harar Cavalry. It was a grey day and when the sun goes in at Harar it is very cold. We walked around the "aerodrome" and watched the steady procession of villagers, mostly women, moving across country carrying great loads of wood and fuel on their backs. My attention was attracted by a line of oxen and zebus which was coming up the hill towards us. Some of the oxen were covered with linen trappings so that only their heads were visible. "They are going to be killed for the Royal feast," Ato Lorenzo Taezaz informed me, "and they are covered like that so that the natives shall not see the meat before they eat it." No doubt there was more wisdom in that measure than met the eye, for the natives eat their meat raw.

I was beginning to get a little impatient, cold and hungry. "The Emperor has been detained on account of some important dispatches which have just arrived from Addis Ababa," Taezaz explained. "It is very important for you to wait for His Majesty as he has a message which he wishes you to send to your newspaper." I scanned the distant mountains through my field-glasses. My eyes travelled along to the east, beyond the Mountain of Refuge. Ato Lorenzo Taezaz followed my gaze. "The mountain you are looking at," he said, "is where the deposed Emperor Lej Yasu lives. You have probably heard that he lingers in golden chains, to which he and one of the rebel Rases are linked like debtor and creditor. He is in chains, but they are not made of gold. You have probably heard, too, that he is mad, a drug fiend, and addicted to strange vices. This is not true. Lej Yasu is a chronic sufferer from rheumatism and, by reason of his confinement and luxurious living, has grown enormously stout. Although he is a prisoner he is allowed everything he likes. The Emperor sends him large sums of money, and even sent his own doctors to him recently when he was ill. How is this money spent? Not on the Emperor Lej Yasu ! At the top of that mountain there is a monastery presided over by Abba Hanna. Lej Yasu's palace, a modern building of European design, adjoins it, but for the privilege of living there the church demands large offerings from the captive Emperor. The church in Abyssinia, you see, is all-powerful. Lej Yasu himself does not like power, and he is no longer anxious to return to the throne. Why is it necessary to keep him so carefully guarded? Because of the enemies of Haile Selassie, not of Lej Yasu, who would like to kill the ex-Emperor and set up a Pretender in his place. Although Lej Yasu is not mad, he has not the mental stability to wield the



power of an Emperor. He turned Mohammedan not because of deep religious convictions but because the Turkish Consul at Harar promised him the title of Sultan if he embraced the faith of the Prophet. In the Great War the Kaiser persuaded Lej Yasu that he held the fate of Europe in his hand and if Ethiopia would come in on the side of Germany he would help our country afterwards. Lej Yasu even started to march towards German East Africa to help General von Lettow-Vorbeck. England and France seized their opportunity to push forward the claims of Ras Tafari. The rest of the story you know."

It was interesting to hear about this other Emperor, in whose veins the blood of Menelik flows and who has not been seen since 1916. But Tazaz was the only Abyssinian who mentioned his name to me. The country is full of spies and the Emperor hears every word that is spoken about himself and his enemies. I wondered, after what I had been told about Lej Yasu, if he was perhaps not the happiest of all the ex-Kings after all?

A sudden commotion across the hills heralded, at long last, the approach of the Emperor, and in a few minutes an escort of lancers came into view, moving at a gentle trot, followed by a running and shouting rabble above whose heads the scarlet umbrella danced a little perilously. At first it seemed as if the Emperor's car was being borne along by the crowd, which surged and fought to touch some part of the Imperial equipage. In a few minutes the Emperor had alighted from his Ford and a procession of cars which followed disgorged a glittering company of princes, priests, great officers of State, gentlemen of the Diplomatic Corps, Court Chamberlains and, by no means least, a cinema photographer.

A superb Persian carpet was hurriedly arranged



The Emperor in the uniform of Field Marshal



L'Éthiopie est un peuple  
une nation civile qui veut vivre  
en paix avec ses voisins. Jalouse de ses  
droits, mais respectueuse des droits  
d'autrui, elle ne souffrira aucune

» *ቀ. ደክሙኛ ጌላ.*

18.5.35.

Message in the Emperor's hand presented to the Author

on the damp ground, a semblance of a throne cunningly devised with cushions and velvets, by well-trained court "property men," and an enormous scarlet-and-gold State umbrella, edged with gold tassels and the red, mustard, and green of Ethiopia was opened to form a kind of Royal pavilion for the Emperor and his *entourage* to stand beneath. It all reminded me a little of *Alice in Wonderland*. At a signal from the Emperor's secretary I moved forward, bowed very low and inquired after His Majesty's health. The Emperor, who looked tired and a little weary of this endless round of parades and displays, explained that he had been delayed unexpectedly but he was very glad that I was going to see the cavalry display which was to be followed by a demonstration of long-range target shooting by Harar's crack marksmen. He had, too, a short message which he desired me to send to the British public through the medium of the *Daily Mail*. The Emperor's secretary produced a sheet of paper bearing the Royal crown and coat-of-arms which he handed to Haile Selassie, who in turn handed it to me. The message was written in French, in the Emperor's own hand and said (see plate, facing this page): *L'Ethiopie est un peuple et une nation civile qui veut vivre en paix avec ses voisins. Jalouse de ses droits, mais respectueuse des droits d'autrui, elle ne souffrira aucune injustice.* After I had read the message His Majesty said: "I have never written a message before for publication in a foreign newspaper, but I thought you might like to keep this as a little memento of your visit." I thanked the Emperor and assured him that I was deeply conscious of the honour he had done me.

The morning's programme had evidently been considerably curtailed and the cavalry display only lasted half an hour and consisted of a mock charge by two troops of horsemen, followed by a skirmish and attack

upon infantry and finally a canter-past in front of the royal enclosure. The Emperor watched the proceedings with a calm which, at moments, amounted almost to boredom. From the Aviation Field (I never discovered how it got this name because the aerodrome used by the Emperor was some miles away), we withdrew to the shooting-range, the procession re-forming with the imperial Ford leading, escorted as before by the Sovereign's Guard of Honour, and the rear being brought up by our own ridiculous contraption.

A vast crowd had gathered at the shooting range and here a more permanent-looking royal pavilion had been erected. At the spot where the Emperor alighted another car had drawn up and was almost hidden from view by huge linen sheets held up by palace flunkeys. "The Empress Menen is waiting there," Ato Lorenzo Taezaz informed me. "These sheets are always held up when she appears in public to shield her from the Evil Eye." The Emperor disappeared for a few minutes to speak to the Empress and then made his way to the temporary pavilion. The proceedings were opened by Haile Selassie himself, personally firing a series of "bursts" with a Lewis gun, while the waving of white discs by natives above the targets indicated that the shots had found their mark. Unless one was aware that the Emperor is considered one of the best shots in the country one might have accepted the waving of the white discs as a foregone conclusion. As a rule, when Haile Selassie goes shooting, it is customary for the Emperor's marksman (himself a crack shot) to take the first shot *and miss*. The Emperor then fires to show the people that there are none superior to him, even at shooting. On this occasion that formality was dispensed with, probably because the Emperor was tired and wanted to get back to Harar. The shooting lasted nearly an hour, and, judging from the frequent

appearances of the white discs, everything was carried out according to plan. The Emperor shook hands with his Belgian officers, pinned a decoration on the breast of Commandant Listray, and once again entered his car and the long column made its way slowly back to Harar, headed by the escort of lancers which made a passage through the dense throng of wondering-eyed peasants, beggars, warriors and priests. I, too, was glad it was all over.

That afternoon I received a further message from the Emperor drawing my attention to a *communiqué* published in Rome to the effect that Abyssinia was manufacturing poison-gas and acquiring an air fleet. The Foreign Office at Addis Ababa was in the habit of issuing these commentaries every other day, but after a time Special Correspondents realized that they were distributed as much in the interests of the Department of Inland Revenue as that of truth. The Emperor's messenger authorized me to deny (by wireless) these latest Italian charges and at the same time extended an invitation to me to accompany His Majesty the next morning to Mass at the Cathedral of Saint Michael and also to inspect the tomb of Ras Makonnen which was nearing completion.

These little attentions of the Emperor were becoming almost embarrassing, but I never doubted Haile Selassie's sincerity even if he was conscious of the fact that two million readers in Great Britain would now hear, for the first time, something of the Abyssinian side of the question. These reviews, parades and processions were all very well from the pantomime point of view (and they supplied plenty of picturesque "copy"), but they gave one very little idea of what was really going on behind the scenes. If one judged by the day-to-day scenes at Harar and Addis Ababa one would have concluded that a mimic war on

Salisbury Plain was about to take place. Most of the educated Abyssinians with whom I talked still thought of war in terms of Adowa. They were convinced that England would intervene on the side of their country once Mussolini had opened his campaign. This unshakable belief in the English amongst the Abyssinians dates back to Magdala, and the name of Napier is still held in deep respect. An opinion which I often heard expressed was that the Emperor should have launched an attack on the Italians in the Ogaden immediately after the Wal Wal incident. The Italians, they say, would have been unprepared (there were then no roads to the frontier and only a small native garrison in Italian Somaliland), and a decisive defeat could have been inflicted. Mussolini would then, they contended, have been compelled to cast his eyes in other directions for colonial conquest. By not acting in December, 1934, they had given Mussolini time to prepare and the Emperor would now have to resort to defensive tactics, making use of the weapons that nature and geography had provided (seeing that they were forbidden to buy arms to defend their country and possessions) and await the inevitable economic collapse of Italy. But the Emperor in our various discussions always emphasized his faith in the League of Nations. "Italy would not dare challenge the combined strength of the British Empire and France," he would say. "By her bullying attitude she is losing the good will of the entire world and the time will come when the force of universal opinion will bring Mussolini to his knees." Until very recently, I believe, Haile Selassie had ideas of a bloodless, diplomatic Adowa.

The Mass at Saint Michael's Cathedral began at 6 a.m. The usual crowd had assembled round the church door and it was only with the help of Lorenzo Taezaz that we were able to gain admittance. The

Abyssinian churches, like the Coptic churches we saw in Eritrea and Somaliland, are built on the same plan, the outer walls of which are circular or octagonal. Within the outer walls there are two inner walls, also circular or octagonal, and the innermost walls enclose the sanctuary, the interior of which is very rarely seen by anyone but the priests. The walls of the churches are covered with amusing frescoes which range in subject from tiger-hunts to the legend of the Queen of Sheba. Very few of the frescoes are old, for as soon as they show signs of wear they are repainted. Besides these frescoes there is usually an untidy collection of photographs, of Menelik, Haile Selassie, the Empress Menen, even Lej Yasu, as well as tawdry oleographs of the Sacred Heart and the Virgin Mary. The churches are usually indescribably dirty and the priests will only open them if you produce a handful of coins.

On this occasion, on account of the crush of people, one saw even less of the ceremony than usual. The air was sickly with incense. The Emperor and Empress were seated on thrones within the innermost wall, but at opposite sides of the church, where they alone had a view of the sanctuary. The rest of the congregation had to stand. I kicked my foot against something and it turned out to be a kettle. The priests were chanting hymns in Geez, the dead language of Abyssinia. From my position I could not follow the ritual at all and not until the end of the Mass did I see the priests. Carrying their silver and gold crosses, and clad in sumptuous purple and gold vestments (somebody said they were made of Japanese silk), they conducted the Emperor and Empress to the church door. Here the Imperial couple took leave of the bishops and priests and the Emperor continued on foot to the Makonnen Mausoleum, opposite the Cathedral. The Empress,



as soon as she appeared on the steps of the church, was surrounded by her ladies who shielded her from the Evil Eye by holding strips of sheeting around her, and at the same time the women outside greeted her appearance by a strange wailing cry. She then followed the Emperor. The tomb was only half complete and it was difficult to estimate what its final appearance would be like. A great press of people surrounded the Emperor, but after the inspection, when he was about to enter his car, he noticed Lorenzo Taczaz. Haile Selassie summoned me and asked me if I had liked the Mass and whether I thought the Makonnen Mausoleum would look as fine as the Menelik tomb at Addis Ababa. I reminded His Majesty that I had not yet visited his capital. The royal cars then moved off, preceded by the escort of lancers, and I returned to the Imperatrice to spend the day quietly in preparation for the next royal event, the Emperor's dinner, timed for eight o'clock that evening.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE EMPEROR ENTERTAINS

A TORRENTIAL downpour swept across Harar on the evening of the Emperor's dinner, and within an hour the sandy tracks outside the town walls, as well as the streets of Harar itself, were turned into rivers of mud. Later in the evening the rains abruptly stopped, like the turning-off of a tap. Chapman Andrews turned up looking rather like an Admiral, and his decorations included the Star of Ethiopia (Third Class) which had been distributed wholesale at the Coronation. Mrs. Chapman Andrews bemoaned the non-arrival of a parcel from Paris, which had been held up at Djibuti (awaiting the arms import licence), but nevertheless contrived to look the best-dressed woman at the dinner. Evans, who had left most of his kit at Djibuti, little suspecting that he was going to eat French dinners with royalty in the depths of Africa, had borrowed the Vice-Consul's clothes. For my own part I had explained to His Majesty that I had only brought one dark suit with me but I had the royal permission to appear in that attire at the dinner.

At ten minutes to eight we arrived at the Palace. The whole of the exterior was lit with rows of electric bulbs and gave one the feeling of arriving for the *première* of a new film at Hollywood. But, again, the howling of the hyenas and the jackals, in spite of the rain, reminded us that this was Africa. Inside, a dozen or so of the guests had already arrived and were sipping cocktails in a small drawing-room, at one end

of which was a raised dais with two small gilt thrones. The rest of the furnishings started off with the best Louis XIV intentions, but lapsed sadly into Menelik II. The air was heavy with incense, and at first it was difficult to distinguish who the other guests were, but Lorenzo Taczaz suddenly loomed up through the gloom and introduced me to the famous Monsignor Jerome, Bishop of Harar, who has spent over fifty years in Abyssinia. In appearance this remarkable man, with his long flowing hair and beard, looks like a primitive Italian saint, and while he is talking he flutters his long, nervous fingers in a manner that is a little disconcerting. He has watched the Emperor grow up from a delicate, nervous child, when there was little prospect of his ascending the throne of Solomon, and for several years acted as tutor to the young Tafari. They say that his influence over the future Emperor was considerable, and it had even been rumoured that Monsignor Jerome was hoping to persuade his charge to renounce the faith of his ancestors and to become a loyal son of Mother Church. Tafari, however, was too astute to make a mistake of that sort. I found the old man a little difficult to understand, for he is now very deaf and has lost his grasp of European affairs. When I mentioned the word "guerre" to him he appeared not to understand what I meant. I was astonished at this apparent calm amongst the foreigners I met in Harar and Addis Ababa. Even Chapman Andrews seemed outwardly more concerned about the affairs of his puppet empire than the question of what he would do about his wife and small son in the event of war. The only exception was Signor Giardini, the Italian Consul at Harar, who was amongst the guests at the dinner. His wife, to whom he had been recently married, had left hurriedly that evening by mule for Dirre Dowa, *en route* for Djibuti.



Court Chamberlains waiting to be received by the Emperor



The Emperor reviews his troops at Harar

## THE EMPEROR ENTERTAINS

While we talked and the guests assembled, red-coated footmen passed round cocktails and cigarettes, and the buzz of conversation was almost drowned at times by the rain beating against the Palace windows. A movement at the far end of the room indicated the approach of their Majesties, and a moment later the Imperial Parasol-Holder, walking backwards into the room (an extremely difficult procedure calling for a high degree of skill), was followed closely by the Emperor in a blue velvet cape and black jodhpurs, the Empress in a black velvet cape over a finely spun white *chamma*, the Princess Tsahai in a Paris frock, and the little Duke of Harar in a dinner-jacket. This was the first time I had a close view of the Empress Menen and I was much struck by her fine head and almost masculine appearance. She took her place on the dais beside the Emperor, and the European women went up one by one and curtsied first to the Emperor and then to the Empress, and then in turn to the Duke of Harar and Princess Tsahai, much in the manner of Queen Victoria's drawing-rooms when debutantes had to curtsy to each royalty in turn. The Emperor spoke for a few minutes to the Bishop of Harar and to the Italian Consul, and then led the way into the dining-room, preceded as before by the Imperial Parasol-Holder. The Emperor and Empress and their son and daughter took their places at the top table, sitting together, with the Bishop of Harar on the Empress's right and Mrs. Chapman Andrews on the Duke of Harar's left. The rest of the guests were placed on either side of two tables, decorated with roses, at right angles to the top table, and I sat between Signor Giardini and Commandant Listray. Our names were printed on small gilt-edged cards, and in front of each guest was placed a menu printed in gold and worded in French with the Lion of Judah at the top, and behind each chair stood a tall Abyssinian footman

in red jacket, white breeches, silk stockings, and patent leather shoes. It was a mixture of Arabian Nights and Alice in Wonderland. The Emperor's Swiss chef had prepared the most delicious French meal, eight courses in all, and we ate off gold plate. We drank champagne and *tedj*. The latter, the universal drink of Abyssinia, is rather sweet and sickly, and is made with honey. The dinner proceeded with perfect smoothness, and there were no pauses between the courses.

The Emperor and Empress spoke very little during the dinner, and then only to each other. My companion, the Belgian Commandant, proved to be very communicative, and it was a pleasure to talk with someone who, at the mention of the word "war," did not affect surprise, shrug his shoulders and murmur an evasive "maybe" or "perhaps" or "who can say" or "it all depends." He knew, just as well as Signor Giardini, sitting on my right, that unless Mussolini committed political suicide before the beginning of October war would come within a few weeks of the end of the rains.

"When the rains cease in Abyssinia," my companion remarked, "it is not the dove of peace that appears with the olive-leaf, but a horde of vultures and hawks scavenging for food amongst the mud—and this year they will find more than they expected."

"You are convinced there will be war?"

"Certainly. When a quarter of a million men, armed with every device that science can contrive for killing, are facing, at a few miles distant, and in some places only a few yards distant, another army of equal size, but only half as well equipped, isn't it obvious that there will be war? And coupled with that, one leader is shouting defiance at the other, promising fantastic rewards to his hypnotized followers, while

the other leader is preaching restraint and a spirit of sweet reasonableness to warriors who are straining at the leash to get at the invaders of the country which has belonged to them since the beginning of time—isn't it absurd to think that the British Empire or the League of Nations or the entire world can stop this war?"

"Do you suggest that the Emperor has all that number of troops waiting at the frontiers to resist the invaders?"

"Not at present, but at a word from the Emperor more than double that number could be mobilized and in less than a fortnight they could be on the frontiers."

"But surely there are not enough modern arms to go round?"

"There are more arms in this country than the Emperor would like the world to believe, but of course, there are not nearly enough for the huge armies which he will have to mass on the Tigré borders in the north and along the Ogaden in the south. I doubt if there are as many as 100,000 modern rifles in this country."

"What about aeroplanes and poison-gas and the chemicals the Italians threaten to put on the ground to burn the natives' feet?"

Listray smiled. I turned to see if my Italian friend had heard my question, but found he was engrossed in a discussion on polo with Chapman Andrews.

"They'll try aeroplanes of course. I doubt if they will use poison gas. Nobody knows what use either will be at this altitude. In any case there will be no massed formations to wipe out, either with bombs or poison-gas. Harar is the only town in Abyssinia that has any semblance of permanence about it. Addis Ababa is just a mass of tin roofs and thatched *tukals*. They'll kill more whites than blacks if they bomb the capital. It would be no great moral blow to the people if Addis Ababa was wiped out. The Emperor realizes that his capital is the only movable one in the world."



"Then you don't consider that the Italians, apart from their rifles and ammunition, have any great advantage over the Abyssinians?"

"That is a difficult question to answer. The Italian aeroplanes will be useful for reconnaissance purposes and for bombing the railway, and I'm afraid the Abyssinians won't be able to shoot them down with the few anti-aircraft guns they possess and which they have not yet learned to use. But if I was organizing an army to attack this country I would not worry much about aeroplanes and poison-gas. I would concentrate on my Army Service Corps and Red Cross. De Bono and Graziani, if they know their job, will realize that their main problems are transport and disease. The further they move from their base the more acute will these problems become. Think of the amount of provisions *and water* they will have to carry with them! If they move slowly and consolidate their position as they go along it will take years and more millions than the Italians have got or can ever borrow to conquer Abyssinia. I don't think somehow Mussolini will risk tactics of that sort. It will make his position too perilous at home. The slope is slippery enough as it is. I think he will count on a spectacular victory at Adowa, which will have an enormous effect on the *morale* of the troops and the people at home, and then he will look for the White Flag."

"What about the Abyssinian tactics?"

The Belgian smiled again. The Emperor's old brandy was above reproach and conversation flowed easily.

"Did you hear what Ras Seyoum, the grandson of the Emperor John and the second most powerful man in Abyssinia, said the other day when he was asked that question? 'We shall attack by night, and disappear by day.' Well, I believe that, as far as the Abyssinians have any tactics at all, those will approxi-

mate to their plans. The Emperor's spies keep him informed of the number of the enemy and where the different divisions are stationed. His plan of campaign must be largely dictated by that. His policy, I think, will be to retreat to the high and difficult ground in the north, and avoid any major encounter in the open in the south."

"Does the Emperor really believe that the League of Nations will apply sanctions and stop Mussolini?"

"Up till a month or two ago he had implicit faith in the League. But that faith was not shared by certain powerful elements to whom Haile Selassie has had to listen. It is being felt to-day that the Emperor is dilly-dallying while the enemy is working furiously to be ready to attack when the rains cease. But I think the Emperor knows what he is doing. If war is declared to-morrow, not only the Italians but the Abyssinians themselves would be surprised at the preparations he has made."

"How do you think war will be declared?"

"There won't be any formal declaration. It will just happen, like Wal Wal. And it will be too late then to hold a post-mortem at Geneva to decide who fired the first shot."

We had talked far too long and, I am afraid, far from discreetly, and I could only put it down to the brandy, the cigars and the incense. When I turned to my Italian companion to tell him about my experiences at Mogadiscio, I found that he was discussing the price of cattle at Harar with Chapman Andrews. The English Consul had sent his small son's nurse to the market with ten *thalers* to buy a cow. She went away for three days and it was concluded that she had absconded with the money. On the fourth day she arrived safely with the cow, and on the fifth day the cow presented Chapman Andrews with a sturdy calf.

The nurse's story was that she had been forcibly detained by the cattle-dealer, who discovered that she had bought the cow for the British Consul and then tried to make her pay another ten *thalers*. Eventually she was rescued by the police.

It was now nearly ten o'clock, and the Emperor and Empress, preceded by the Imperial Parasol-Holder, and followed by their guests, led the way back to the drawing-room. The Imperial couple took their place on the dais and the Emperor chatted in turn to Monsignor Jerome, Ras Nassibu, the Minister of Justice (who is known as "The mouth of the Emperor") and the Emperor's uncle. Monsignor Jerome seemed highly delighted to be with his former pupil once more, and fluttered his long fingers excitedly and jumped up time and again to straighten a crease in the Emperor's cape. The Empress conversed only with her son and daughter. At a signal from the Emperor's secretary I came forward, bowed so that the back of my neck could be seen, and took the now vacant chair on His Majesty's left.

"I always think the life of a journalist," the Emperor began, "must be one of the most fascinating of all. I believe that if I had had to choose a profession, I would have selected yours. You see, I have my own paper at Addis Ababa, *Light and Peace*, and although I am editor only in name I do sometimes write non-political and unsigned articles for it. The Emperor of Manchuria, when he was Emperor of China, frequently wrote anonymously in one of the Peking papers, without even the editor knowing the name of the contributor."

"Does Your Majesty consider that the Ethiopian case is being presented fairly in the English Press?" I inquired.

"The latest batch of papers I have received," the

Emperor replied, "seem to indicate a change of tone in favour of Ethiopia. Some Englishmen are at last beginning to realize that we are not a race of savages. The trouble is that so few of your journalists are really conversant with conditions out here and have little idea of the difficulties with which I am contending *inside* my borders let alone beyond the frontiers. When journalists visit Ethiopia I am afraid they regard us as a very picturesque but a rather contemptible people. They do not appreciate that while we are immensely proud of our ancient heritage there is a growing body of opinion in this country which is calling for the *best* of Western culture. The trouble is we do not always *get* the best and we are only beginning to tell the good from the bad."

The Empress was listening to the Emperor's remarks and Haile Selassie interrupted our conversation to introduce me to Her Majesty and to explain the nature of my mission to Ethiopia. The Empress only spoke a few words to me and asked me how I liked Harar, and how long I proposed to spend in Ethiopia.

"I am going to Jig Jigga next week," the Emperor concluded, "but I hope we shall have the pleasure of meeting again at Addis Ababa !"

At half-past eleven the rain outside dramatically ceased, and the Emperor, who was looking tired, and anxious, it seemed, to return to his desk, whispered to the Empress that it was time to withdraw. The Imperial couple then stood up, bowing to the right and to the left, stepped down from the dais and, followed by the Princess and the Duke of Harar, left the room.

We all went home to bed, glad in a way to breathe the less exalted air of Harar's dim streets, while the Emperor had gone back to his study to prepare for war.

## CHAPTER XIX

### IT BEGAN AT WAL WAL

**T**HE real truth of what happened at Wal Wal on the afternoon of Wednesday, December 5th, 1934, will probably never be revealed. The whole incident has been most thoroughly investigated, and by the unanimous decision of the Arbitration Commission, reached on September 3rd, 1935, neither Italy nor Abyssinia could be held responsible. A very great deal has been printed and spoken since that fateful day last year purporting to be an accurate account of what actually happened. Half of these statements can be discounted at once as bearing little, if any, relation to the truth. Some of the propagandist utterances emanating from Rome dealing with the Wal Wal incident (as well as other alleged incidents) border on the ridiculous. A number of eminent people in this country, too, have given their considered opinions about Wal Wal, and confuse it, I believe, with Wagga Wagga in Australia. For these reasons, amongst many others, it was interesting to hear the Abyssinian point of view. This was supplied to me by Ato Lorenzo Taezaz one afternoon in the garden of the British Consulate at Harar.

As Ato Lorenzo Taezaz was a member of the Ethiopian Commission which visited Wal Wal, and in view of the fact that he is regarded as one of the coming young men in Abyssinia, and has the Emperor's ear in many matters of State importance, his account commands our respect. In many ways this confirms the statements of Colonel Clifford, the head of the British Commission.

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It is necessary, first of all, to explain briefly the functions of the Anglo-Abyssinian Commission and to review the state of things at Wal Wal immediately preceding the clash on December 5th, 1934. The joint Anglo-Abyssinian Commission for the delimitation of the Frontier of British Somaliland, having completed its work of demarcation, was charged by the two governments with the further duty of surveying the grazing grounds of the Ogaden in compliance with the Anglo-Abyssinian Treaty of May 14th, 1897, which stipulated that

“the tribes occupying either side of the line should have the right to use the grazing grounds on the other side, but during their migrations it is understood that they shall be subject to the jurisdiction of the territorial authority. Free access to the nearest wells is equally reserved to the tribes occupying either side of the line.” (Letters of June 4th, 1897, exchanged between Sir Rennell Rodd and His Highness the Ras Maconnan.)

From time immemorial the wells at Wal Wal (see map facing p. 300) have been a common watering place for both British and Abyssinian Somali tribes although these wells lie about a hundred miles from the British border. In pursuance of their inquiries the Joint Commission proceeded to Wal Wal via Dagab-Bur and Ado, but in view of the proximity of the undelimited frontier of Italian Somaliland, Colonel Clifford and his colleagues took the wise precaution of informing the Government in Rome of their projected visit. The wisdom of this move, particularly in view of the happenings of the next four days, can be very clearly appreciated. An Italian in Abyssinia with whom I discussed this point, however, contended that the very fact that the Joint Commission saw fit to communicate with the Italian Government before proceeding to Wal Wal indicated

also over the camp of the Abyssinian escort. Not content with this extraordinary performance, one of the aeroplanes executed a further series of dives over Colonel Clifford, and a member of its crew was clearly seen by nine reliable witnesses (including Abyssinians and English) training a machine-gun on members of the Commission.

Ato Lorenzo Taczaz told me that actual photographs exist of this incident, and it was intended to produce these at the Inquiry into the Wal Wal incident. Following this remarkable exhibition, Colonel Clifford expressed his intense indignation at such grossly discourteous behaviour, and immediately announced his intention of returning to Ado so as not to complicate the situation for the Abyssinian Government. Captain Cimmaruta offered neither an apology nor an explanation, but informed the British Commission that he would allow freedom of movement at Wal Wal only to the British officers. This proposal was very rightly declined by Colonel Clifford, who ordered his personal escort to remain in camp that night.

The next day, November 25th, both the Abyssinian and the British Missions retired to Ado, thirty miles away, with the intention of remaining there till they received an official reply to their protest from the Italian Government. It was at this stage that the Italian effort to place the responsibility for the entire incident on the heads of the Abyssinians receives its chief claim. The Abyssinian escort, instead of accompanying the Commission to Ado, remained behind at Wal Wal. This is interpreted in Italian eyes as a deliberately provocative act on the part of the Abyssinians. The reason for the Abyssinian action in remaining at Wal Wal was undoubtedly to make clear their intention of avoiding any appearance of retreat or acquiescence to Italian demands on territory which rightly or wrongly (and there can

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be no doubt that *morally* Wal Wal is in Abyssinian territory) they considered to be their own.

For the next ten days the two forces remained encamped in a line within a few feet of each other. The tension existing on both sides can readily be imagined, and the position grew increasingly grave.

To aggravate matters, Captain Cimmaruta sent a number of threatening and abusive notes to the Commander of the Abyssinian escort. In one of these letters an officer of the Abyssinian army was described as a "brigand chief."

It is clear from a close study of the events following the arrival of the Anglo-Abyssinian Commission at Wal Wal on November 23rd (which I have only briefly sketched here) up till the date of the clash, nearly a fortnight later, that the Italian Commander gave every possible provocation to the Abyssinians, apart from his arrogant rudeness towards Colonel Clifford and the British Mission.

In a feeble effort to justify his loutish behaviour, Captain Cimmaruta contended that the Italian authorities were unaware of the Commission's movements (although Colonel Clifford had informed the Italian Government of the projected visit of the Joint Commission to Wal Wal). Moreover Captain Cimmaruta maintained that it was impossible for the aeroplanes which flew over the Commission and made a hostile demonstration on the afternoon of November 23rd to have known before leaving Mogadiscio (a few hours' flight away) that the Commission was in the Wal Wal district. In view of the fact that Captain Cimmaruta admitted later that he could always get into immediate touch with his headquarters at Mogadiscio through his wireless post at Wardair, a short distance away, the former statement appears to be valueless.

As I have already remarked, the real truth of what



occurred around about 3.30 p.m. on Wednesday, December 5th (in the Abyssinian calendar, Heddar 26th, 1927) will never be known. There were no impartial witnesses present. But it matters very little now who fired the first shot. The Abyssinians, while denying the Italian charges, never attached much importance to this question because they realized that the guilt could never be finally established one way or the other. The vital issue of Wal Wal, they contended, boiled down to the question as to whether Wal Wal was in Italian or Abyssinian territory.

It is interesting, however, to examine the two versions of the actual incident. My friend Tæzaz had proceeded with Colonel Clifford and the other members of the Anglo-Abyssinian Commission to Ado (following the hostile demonstration of the Italian aeroplanes on the afternoon of November 23rd), and the following account of what happened at Wal Wal is derived from information supplied to the Abyssinian Commission by members of the escort who had remained at Wal Wal.

According to this account, signed by Tæzaz and the three other Abyssinian Commissioners :

“At about 3.30 p.m. on December 5th, 1934, shouted orders of ‘A terra !’ were heard in the direction of the individual shelters where the Italian *banda* were stationed. Thereupon all the *banda* entered their shelters. Immediately afterwards a rifle shot and the shout of ‘Fuoco !’ were heard, and the *banda* fired a volley towards the Abyssinian camp. The Abyssinian soldiers, who were not expecting any such attack, were thus taken by surprise and in consequence a large number fell. After this our men returned to their shelters and were defending themselves to the best of their ability when, ten minutes after the first shot, three aeroplanes arrived and began to drop bombs. Immediately afterwards two tanks arrived

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and opened fire with machine-guns all round the camp. The aeroplanes did not stop dropping bombs until nightfall and rifle and machine-gun fire continued all night. As a result of this act of aggression committed by the Italian *banda* our men lost 107 dead and 45 wounded."

The following day, December 6th, the examination of six native deserters from the Italian side commenced under the supervision of Ato Lorenzo Taezaz, representing the Abyssinian Mission, and Mr. Alexander Curle, representing the British Mission. In the course of the examination of the first witness it was alleged that Captain Cimmaruta had given instructions to his men that they were to dress in white so that they could be easily recognized by the aeroplanes and armoured cars. On the arrival of the aeroplanes and tanks they were to withdraw. The signal for the outbreak of hostilities was to be a whistle from Captain Cimmaruta. Another witness declared (on oath over the Koran) that Captain Cimmaruta addressing his men had said, "When a fly comes and settles on your face you drive it off, and if it does not go, you kill it (he made a gesture of driving off and killing a fly). This is what I will do to the Ethiopians."

Captain Cimmaruta, it was alleged, had made that speech on several occasions. When asked what signal they were to wait for from Captain Cimmaruta this witness replied: "When you hear the whistle you will load your rifle with five cartridges. When you hear 'Fuoco!' and 'A terra!' you will fire, and when the aeroplanes and the armoured cars arrive, you will withdraw into the fort. And, in order that you may be recognized by the aeroplanes, you will wear a white turban, a white belt passing over one shoulder and under the opposite arm, and a white robe and not a jacket."

The evidence of the other witnesses confirmed, in

much the same language, the statements of those I have quoted.

Now let us see what the Italians say about the Wal Wal affair. Here is the official "explanation" :

"The Anglo-Ethiopian Commission which is inquiring into the grazing rights at Ogaden appeared, on November 23rd, before Wal Wal, a place which belongs to Italian Somaliland and which has been occupied by Italian troops for some years. A personal interview and also an exchange of letters took place between the British and Ethiopian Commissioners and the officer commanding the Italian post. The Ethiopian Commissioner maintained that Wal Wal belonged to Ethiopia and that consequently the Ethiopian troops had the right to proceed. The officer commanding the Italian post replied that he could not permit the Ethiopian troops, numbering some 1,000 effectives, to advance into Italian Somaliland and that the question of the possession of Wal Wal was for the two Governments to discuss. The Anglo-Ethiopian Commission then left the zone while the Ethiopian troops remained in front of the Italian post. During the following days, the officer commanding the Italian post at Wal Wal, with the object of avoiding incidents, proposed to the officer commanding the Ethiopian troops that the line occupied by the Italian native troops should be separated by pickets from the line occupied by the Ethiopian troops and that the said troops on either side should then be withdrawn a short distance. The Ethiopian commander rejected the proposal of the Italian commander. The two lines thus remained in contact. The Ethiopians then sought to bring about desertions among the Italian native troops and to incite them to combat by means of warlike *fantasias* according to the Ethiopian custom. On December 5th, the Ethiopian troops made a sudden attack in force on our post without any provocation. It appears from news received from the Somaliland Government that

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the signal for the attack was given by a shot fired in the air by an Ethiopian soldier who was clearly visible from the Italian positions. A fusillade by the Ethiopian troops followed immediately, causing considerable losses among the Italian native troops. The Italian post defended itself in its positions until the arrival of reinforcements which enabled it to repulse the aggressors and put them to flight. Aeroplanes and an armoured car took part in this action. The Italian Government accordingly protested to the Addis Ababa Government against this sudden attack while reserving the right to state what reparations it considered due, which were afterwards defined as follows : apologies from the Governor of Harar, salute to the Italian flag, punishment of the offenders, compensation for the dead and wounded."

The number of Italian casualties at Wal Wal, according to the Clifford Report, were 30 killed and 60 wounded, all of whom were natives, a comparatively small figure compared with the Abyssinians whose casualties consisted of 107 killed and 45 wounded. This figure, however, does not agree with that given by Franz Padar, a Hungarian doctor at Harar, who attended to a number of the wounded after Wal Wal. He gives the Abyssinian casualties as 800 and the Italians 1,500. Dr. Padar suggests, moreover, that a number of the wounded were devoured on the field of battle by hyenas.

The Italians are also said to have seized considerable loot, and they admitted, in an official note, that they bombed Ado, while the Abyssinian rearguard was removing the wounded and the baggage of the Commission. The Italians also allege that letters were found amongst the abandoned belongings of the Abyssinian escort which, if they are authentic, shed another light on the Wal Wal incident. These letters were

written in Amharic and bear the official Lion of Judah emblem on the top of the notepaper. It would appear from these letters that the Wal Wal incident was planned several weeks in advance, and the fact that the Anglo-Abyssinian Commission arrived at the same time was a sheer coincidence. The first of these letters is dated 20th October, 1934, and was sent by an Abyssinian officer to one of his superiors. The translation reads :

*"Having greeted you, I inform you that in the country where we have arrived there is not water in sufficiency to be had except at Wal Wal. As for our reasons for coming, I say that it is better that it should be said of us that we came and were satisfied, rather than that we came and retired. Your counsel was better than the others ; now if we wait for the others, our own subjects will attack us. If, on the contrary, we say, On, on, their own subjects will attack them. If we waste time our subjects will betray us and we shall be dishonoured. That is why I say : 'Let us meet and seize the water.' Written from the Messeri district."*

In a second letter the writer says :

*"The troops which are on our side are ready and they await your orders as the orders of God. If we were all assembled here we could take counsel on the best way of executing operations. But we can do nothing without you. Thus all the work is ready but it is held up until the soldiers are assembled."*

On the eve of the incident one Abyssinian officer writes to another :

*"Now they have begun to desert on their side and come over to us. We are drawn up at a distance of only ten feet from the Europeans. Our guns are loaded. We have not yet fired but we are in this situation. Pray for us to the Lord and may the God of Israel suffer us to meet again in life. . . ."*

## IT BEGAN AT WAL WAL

Other alleged evidence from the same source seeks to prove that the Abyssinian irregulars in the pay of Addis Ababa had planned an attack on Wal Wal as early as March, 1934. These irregulars were said to be under the command of a former Italian subject who had murdered an Italian officer and had fled from Italian Somaliland. A further contention is that the original Abyssinian escort which accompanied the Joint Commission to Wal Wal on November 23rd only consisted of fifty troops but was joined by 1,000 irregulars who took up their position opposite the Wal Wal garrison and were the instigators of the clash on December 5th.

Abyssinia asked Italy for arbitration under the 1928 Treaty. This was firmly refused on the grounds that "aggression had been flagrant on Abyssinia's part." On January 3rd of this year, after a succession of Notes had been exchanged, Abyssinia appealed to the League of Nations. On January 19th it was announced that the two Governments had agreed to negotiate in accordance with the 1928 Treaty, but while Abyssinia, very naturally, asked for arbitration covering the whole boundary question (which was obviously the vital issue of Wal Wal) as well as the actual Wal Wal incident on December 5th, Italy insisted that the discussion should be limited to the actual incident. As both sides could supply ample documentary evidence to prove their case it was obvious from the outset that it was hopeless to try and fix the original guilt to one side or the other. One point, however, is clear because we have the impartial evidence of Colonel Clifford and his colleagues. The attitude of the officer in charge of the Italian troops at Wal Wal was not only provocative, to express it mildly, but the demonstration of the Italian aeroplanes which decided Colonel Clifford to withdraw to Ado was definitely menacing. No apology or explanation has been

supplied by the Italian Government for this gross breach of international courtesy.

The whole question of Wal Wal and of frontiers has long since been eclipsed by other and far wider issues. Mussolini recognized at last the slenderness of his "Abyssinian aggression" case and has now put all his cards on the table. He has been telling the world in language which would shock the Kaiser that Italy only seeks to spread the message of civilization (concealed inside a Fascist bomb) in the dark places of savage Abyssinia. Tired of the rôle of the poor sinned-against Italian lamb desiring only to be allowed to sleep peacefully beside the Abyssinian lion, he would now pose as a new Messiah, bringing comfort and succour to the persecuted and heavy-laden. He would enter the New Jerusalem, too, not on a mule, but in a tank, with aeroplanes roaring and diving overhead, and along streets strewn not with palm leaves, but with the distorted bodies of his gassed victims. The picture is hardly an elevating one, but it is the one Mussolini himself has painted, and he has made no secret of the colours that he has chosen. Perhaps even before this book is in print the new Messiah will have started on his long journey. I believe he will find the road different, very different, from what he expected.

## CHAPTER XX

### ON TO ADDIS ABABA

ON the day we left Harar on our way to Addis Ababa, the Emperor, who was leaving that day for Jig Jigga, sent me a large signed portrait of himself, together with one of the Empress and the Duke of Harar. "The Emperor particularly asked me to say that this is the only photograph the Empress has ever signed," the spokesman of Haile Selassie added. Later in the day I received another present from His Majesty, a scarlet-and-gold State umbrella, similar to the ones carried by the Imperial Parasol-Holder. It was a charming gesture on the part of the Emperor, for he had remembered my remarking the picturesque character of these symbols of royalty. When I showed it to "Ras" Makonnen, he asked me if he might hold it over me when we walked about the streets.

The journey to Dirre Dowa was uneventful, and, thanks to the good offices of Lorenzo Taczaz, was accomplished in the comparative luxury of a car. Before we left Harar we experienced a slight financial difference of opinion with the proprietor of the Hotel Imperatrice and with M. Versabedian, the owner of the taxi. The former presented me with an account in which on two occasions he charged me ten shillings for one glass of *rossi et vermouth*. When I mentioned that I considered this a little excessive he replied that I had drunk *a whole bottle* on each occasion. M. Versabedian's account amounted to £15. This was in addition to another account from another Armenian



taxi-driver (whose taxi I hired on several occasions when the other utterly refused to move) which amounted to £7. The cost of transport, according to this scale of charges, amounted to about ten shillings per mile. I could have hired a mule for the whole time I was at Harar for less than ten shillings. I informed both of these Armenian gentlemen that I had no intention of paying their accounts even if it meant our being chained together as debtor and creditor until I arrived in Europe. Both Lorenzo Taczaz and Chapman Andrews endorsed my decision, and the former took upon himself the responsibility of standing surety for me. "The Emperor only visits Harar once a year," pleaded the hotel and taxi proprietors, "and we have to make our harvest while we can." They would not yield one *thaler* and "M. Godding," as I was described in their accounts, must pay in full "or take the consequences." Their attitude was becoming slightly menacing and it was decided that two Somali guards from the Legation should take charge of our baggage and accompany us beyond the gates of the town. These precautions proved effective.

That evening we dined with M. Paris, the French Consul at Dirre Dowa. When we returned to M. Bollo-lakos's hotel shortly before midnight, we found both M. Versabedian and the proprietor of the Imperatrice awaiting us. They indicated, quite politely, that unless their accounts were paid in full they would prevent us from boarding the train for Addis Ababa the next morning. I argued with them, humoured them, cajoled them and made substantial offers of settlement. Finally I effected a truce till the next morning. As the train was due to leave at seven, rather rapid calculations were necessary to ensure our safe departure. It would have been quite simple, of course, to have settled in full and to have explained matters later at Northcliffe

House. But that night I hit upon a better plan. At M. Bollolakos's hotel there was a husky Somali kitchen-boy, known locally as "Jack Johnson." I felt that it would be useful at this stage to establish cordial relations with him. This was arranged fairly easily with the help of a Marie Thérèse dollar. I commissioned him to collect together five of his friends as big as, or if possible bigger than, himself. They would be paid a dollar apiece to conduct myself and entourage, with our baggage, to the station in the morning.

The plan worked admirably. At 6.30 a.m. our procession started on its four-hundred-yards march to the station. At a much earlier hour M. Bollolakos had knocked at my door and informed me that a deputation of Armenians was waiting to see me on the verandah—and it might therefore be advisable for me to leave my room via the inner courtyard. Actually, I think M. Bollolakos was more concerned lest I should attempt to leave without paying *his* bill. The Armenian deputation thought better of their original intentions when they saw me appear with six Somali stalwarts on either side (the kitchen-boy had summoned eleven of his friends), with Evans in front, and "Ras" Makonnen (carrying the State umbrella) immediately behind me. In this formation we arrived at the station, but our numbers had been greatly increased in the few minutes that it took to cover the quarter of a mile from the hotel. It might be a slight exaggeration to say it was a howling mob, but it was something very near to that. Our troubles were not yet at an end because the train was ten minutes late in leaving, and, although the other camp-followers were not allowed on the platform, the two Armenians succeeded in winning over a number of Greek adherents to their cause.

A young Abyssinian lawyer happened to be travelling on the train and he proved an invaluable help

at this difficult juncture. He spoke in a quiet voice and calmed the troubled elements that swirled around us. "The matter will be settled by the British Consul at Addis Ababa," he said, addressing the crowd on the platform (so many people were shouting and waving their arms that it was impossible for him to pick out the principal litigants), "and you may be sure your claim will receive fair treatment. The English journalist is willing to hand over to me the money in dispute and I will hold this sum until a settlement has been reached." The shouting and the clamour ceased, a bell rang somewhere in the distance, the old "Rhinoceros" emitted a high-pitched scream, and before the crowd had recovered from this quick twist of events we had begun our weary journey to Awash.

Weary is an entirely inadequate word to use in describing the journey from Dirre Dowa to Awash. For mile upon mile, and hour after hour, we puffed and panted through landscapes of intolerable desolation, in strange contrast to the glamorous descriptions I had read in the English newspapers by contributors who signed themselves "Our Special Correspondent." Occasionally we saw a vulture, the only creature that seemed to be at home in these waterless wastes, and once or twice we stopped to chase camels from the track. Sometimes we passed through great stretches of black lava, where even the eternal scrub and thorn could find no nourishment. The heat was beyond belief even with the blinds down in the white carriage. To "Ras" Makonnen, however, it was a new and glorious adventure. He had never seen a train before and each time I looked back towards the grey trucks which accommodated the third class passengers, I saw his fuzzy head craned far out of the window and a large grin of satisfaction spread across his face. We stopped at many wayside stations, for water, for lunch,

to deposit mysterious bundles and to collect other mysterious bundles of rags and bottles which sometimes turned out to be natives. There was one exciting moment when a cable broke loose and threatened to overturn the train. This necessitated a halt of half an hour while it was mended.

It was dusk when we arrived at Awash. The river of that name flows at the bottom of a deep ravine a mile from the town and a splendid bridge which spans it forms one of the most important strategic points of the railway. The town consists of a solid wall which protects the hotel and a few Indian traders from the attacks of the Danakils, who have an unpleasant habit of killing every stranger on sight. They say that no Danakil feels himself worthy of the name unless he wears at least one feather in his hair, denoting that he has killed a man within the last twelve months.

I shall always remember the night we spent at Awash because of the cats. I had been warned about the mosquitoes and we had taken copious draughts of quinine in preparation for a mass attack, but nobody had spoken about the cats. We first became aware of their presence at dinner. One by one they stole in from the garden, from the kitchen and from out of the creepers and vines which cunningly concealed the corrugated iron framework of the hotel. Lean cats, fat cats, cats with one eye, cats with no tails, brown cats, black cats, tabby cats, ginger cats, huge tom cats, old cats and pious cats and wanton cats that freely and openly ignored the seventh commandment, cats in dozens, in scores, in hundreds, but all hungry cats. "Where do they all come from?" I asked the Greek manager of the hotel, which belongs, like those at Djibuti, Dirre Dowa and Addis Ababa, to M. Bollolakos. "My predecessor was very fond of cats," he replied, "and he imported two or three thinking they would be useful

for destroying the insects and vermin with which this place is infested. You can see the result."

When I woke up at six o'clock the next morning after a restless night (it is not easy to sleep when several hundred cats are keeping high festival outside your bedroom window and the howl of hyenas and jackals is drowned only by the hungry roar of a lion) people were moving about with acetylene lamps and candles and the "Rhinoceros," a hundred yards away, was getting up steam for the last lap of its ponderous journey into the mountains. "Ras" Makonnen, who as usual had slept outside my door, told me that he had only had an hour's sleep because the cats had crawled and swarmed and danced over him all night long.

After Awash the scenery began to change and the dust and boulders gave way to more luxuriant vegetation. As we climbed, the temperature steadily dropped and European travellers changed from their silk suits into tweeds. Isolated mountains towered many thousands of feet above us and through my glasses I could see little clusters of monastic buildings perched perilously on rocks and crags. As we twisted and turned the same mountain would alternately appear on our right, our left, behind and in front of us. Sometimes I wondered whether we were making any headway at all. We stopped a hundred times to take on water and at every station the white carriage in the centre of the train was besieged by the lame, the halt, the blind, lepers, beggars with no arms or legs, or with left wrist and right ankle cut off (this form of punishment had been abolished by Haile Selassie) and, most horrible to behold of all, those suffering from elephantiasis. "Ras" Makonnen disappeared at every halting-place and reappeared a minute later with handfuls of fresh bananas, plums, lemons, oranges,

and many sickly fruits whose names we never heard. Soon the climb to Addis Ababa grew too steep for our old "Rhinoceros" to tackle alone, and a second engine, called "Hippopotamus," was added to complete our journey to the capital.

It was dark and cold when we approached "The New Flower." There was an atmosphere of suppressed excitement in the white carriage, as well as in the grey trucks behind, as if we were nearing the end of some stupendous undertaking in which we had all risked our lives. Customs officials boarded the train an hour before we reached our destination to make doubly sure that we were fit persons to enter the Capital of Ethiopia. Ticket collectors, who walked along the *outside* of the trains, clinging dangerously to the steel framework of the carriages, inspected our tickets minutely and compared the numbers with those recorded in their books. Overcoats and bowler hats appeared. "Ras" Makonnen came along to supervise our luggage wrapped in a multitude of white *chammas*, and wearing a magnificent pair of patent leather shoes in place of the bare brown feet of Harar. His excitement broke all bounds and he implored me to let him walk twenty miles to see his brother as soon as we arrived at Addis Ababa. For the sake of his shoes, and his feet, I refused to grant his request. (The next day he walked the twenty miles barefoot and put on his shoes just before he reached the village where his brother was living.)

All journeys, even those in which you travel by "Rhinoceros" express, come to an end, and half an hour after we had seen the lights of Addis Ababa twinkling through the eucalyptus trees that shroud it from the stranger's view by day as well as by night, we drew slowly alongside the single platform of Addis Ababa station, the most modern and the cleanest building in Ethiopia.

## CHAPTER XXI

### "THE NEW FLOWER"

OUR arrival at Addis Ababa Station, from almost every point of view, compared very favourably with our send-off at Djibuti a fortnight earlier. The Reception Committee was well up to Abyssinian standards and consisted of half the European colony, several hundred porters, half a dozen hotel proprietors, countless taxi-drivers, a score of Customs officials, numerous police, and a non-descript collection of soldiers, peasants, beggars and children. The battle of the hotel proprietors was swift and sure and resulted in a decided victory for the representatives of our old friend M. Bollolakos, of the Hotel Imperial. The issue was decided almost before the drums of war had sounded by that gentleman approaching me and inquiring whether I was "Mr. Daily Mail." I must admit that I had never thought of myself in that capacity before, and at first I wondered whether he had confused me with one of those admirable people who frequent our lesser coastal resorts and, on being correctly challenged, unconcernedly hand you a £5 note. It seemed not at all improbable that Addis Ababa might indulge in frivolous activities of this kind, in view of all I had heard and read. In any case, I decided that it would be best to continue my patronage of M. Bollolakos's establishments as my relations with the other hotel proprietors of Abyssinia were still a little strained.

The Customs formalities were briefer than usual, but again I had to pay ten shillings duty for my type-

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writer and produce a certificate to explain that I had already paid very heavily for the privilege of smoking English cigarettes in Abyssinia. The courteous Greek, who now addressed me by my correct name, led me to a luxurious hotel taxi which was waiting in the shadow of a large gilt Lion of Judah, in the darkness rather more *passant* than *rampant*, and in a few minutes we were speeding along an excellent asphalt road which had been hurriedly constructed a few years ago for the Coronation. There were no street lamps and in the pitch blackness one could not distinguish any form or shape of buildings, and the streets themselves, at nine o'clock, were already deserted.

The Hotel Imperial, which was once the private house of the Empress Taitu, wife of Menelik, stands in extensive grounds on a hill in the centre of Addis Ababa, and is still filled with furniture presented by European crowned heads. With the exception of our short stays at Aden, it was our first contact with European civilization for three months. I had a room with a bath, and a verandah which gave me a view of the whole of Addis Ababa and the surrounding country. I asked if I might have the bed which Menelik is supposed to have slept in (they rival in number those in which Queen Elizabeth is reputed to have slept in England) but I was informed that Mr. William George, the American Chargé d'Affaires, had exclusive right in this, a vast affair of iron and brass, and I would therefore have to approach him. I then inquired if I might have a bath before dinner, but I was told that although the taps said “hot” as well as “cold” there was no hot water in the hotel and every jugful had to be fetched in kerosene tins from the sulphur springs, two miles away. Baths, therefore, had to be ordered in advance, unless one chose to go down to the spa itself, which is provided with excellent



private baths, cooling rooms, a restaurant and a dance floor.

That night, for the first time in three months, I felt cold in bed. I got out to shut the verandah window and as I did so I heard again the hyena chorus from far across the valley, grim noises of the night which seemed entirely out of keeping with this low thermometer temperature. I opened my door to go and search for more blankets, and as I did so I stumbled across "Ras" Makonnen, who was sleeping there enshrouded in a hundred carpets and rugs and rolled up into a ball for warmth. At 8,000 feet, in the heart of Africa, it can be very cold indeed.

Early the next morning I was awakened by the sounds of the bath being filled, and I hurried to the verandah to catch my first glimpse of the "New Flower." There is something very exciting about arriving in a great city at night and then, when the first beams of light awaken you in the morning, you suddenly remember that you are in a strange country and you leap to your window to see if it really comes up to your expectations. Would Addis Ababa, name pregnant with glamorous suggestion, disappoint me as other romantic cities had?

I saw a great forest of eucalyptus trees which stretched in all directions, and, where it was broken by roofs, they were hideous roofs of corrugated iron, patched with tin. Away to the left, on an eminence, I saw a strange jumble of buildings called Gebbi, the old Palace of Menelik, and even at this distance it looked like an inferior Earl's Court Exhibition. Through a cutting in the trees the gilt Lion of Judah, which guards the station approach to the city, gleamed brightly in the morning sunlight. Beyond the trees horizontal strips of mist hung low above the green hills and over all frowned the rugged outline of the sacred

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Mount Entotto, where the Emperor goes to pray. Nearer at hand a less pleasing aspect of Addis Ababa caught my eye. A bare strip of ground, open to public view and only fifty yards from my verandah, was reserved as a huge public cess-pit. Here Abyssinians of both sexes came to perform the less beautiful functions of nature and all day long a steady procession of clients (there were several attendants with shovels who waited hopefully for tips) visited the place, transacted their business (sometimes a whole family came in together) and then went unconcernedly on their way. After that I went downstairs to breakfast.

My first walk in Addis Ababa was a memorable experience. It is an experience which no traveller forgets, for there is no other capital like this in the world. Thanks to my stay at Harar (and at Asmara a month or two earlier) I was fairly acclimatized to the altitude and I could therefore dispense with one of the luxurious and expensive American taxis with which Addis is infested. In any case, movement in the streets of the capital is highly difficult, except on foot, owing to the vast throngs which parade up and down the untidy thoroughfares from dawn until curfew. The contrasts here are even more startling than at Harar. Addis Ababa was built less than fifty years ago, and to-day, in spite of the efforts of Haile Selassie, it is little more than an untidy conglomeration of stone and mud huts, roofed with thatch or corrugated iron. With the exception of the Emperor's new palace, the Parliament Building and the Hotel Imperial, there are no buildings of more than two stories in the city. But what Addis Ababa lacks in elegance it makes up for in gilt. The Court Architect is a German (he is responsible for the gilt Lion of Judah at the station) and one is not surprised therefore to find a large equestrian statue of Menelik cast in gilt-bronze and that the dome of

Menelik's Mausoleum suggests an offshoot of the Reichstag. A new cathedral which has been many years in building (and is added to from time to time as fresh funds are forthcoming) is already showing similar Aryan tendencies. The Parliament House, built at the Emperor's own expense, has deserted the traditions of Wilhelm II, and blossomed forth in the likeness of a modernistic scent factory with stainless steel embellishments. Most remarkable of all the buildings of Addis Ababa, however, is the Gebbi. It was designed by a French architect who undoubtedly had the Petit Palais in mind at the outset, but allowed his ideas to run riot, with the sad result that the Gebbi now looks like a mixture of Earl's Court and the Alexandra Palace. It is a great entanglement of tin huts, look-out towers, courtyards, outbuildings, throne-rooms, barracks, sheds and stables, surrounded by a high wall which, in places, has completely collapsed. The precincts are crowded in the daytime by stragglers and loafers, soldiers and peasants, chattering and arguing and watching with puzzled stare the motley throng which passes to and fro.

The population of Addis Ababa is a floating one and varies between 100,000 and 200,000, but the city sprawls itself over an area as big as Paris. The shopping quarter in the centre of the city is the only permanent-looking part of Addis Ababa, and radiating from here are a multitude of lanes and alleyways leading to that mysterious wilderness in the trees where the natives bury themselves in their huts and hovels by night. I could now appreciate the remark of Commandant Listray that if the Italians wiped out Addis Ababa with bombs it would spring up again the next morning.

The most comfortably situated people in Addis Ababa are the members of the Diplomatic Corps. They live in parks of their own several miles outside



## The Battle of Magdala

From the painting by a native artist in the collection of the Author



The Emperor Haile Selassie sees an aeroplane for the  
first time

From the painting by a native artist in the collection  
of the Author

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the capital, the lands having been set aside for that purpose by Menelik. The Imperial reason given at the time for isolating the Legations like this was that they would be more secure from attack, but it is much more likely that Menelik preferred to keep his European guests out of earshot of the affairs of Gebbi. The house of the British Minister, Sir Sidney Barton, might be in Surrey instead of Abyssinia, with its English garden carefully tended by Lady Barton; and the Consular officials live in neat tukal-shaped houses in the park. Unquestionably this is the best part of Addis Ababa.

The streets of the capital, as at Harar, present an animated scene from sunrise till dusk. Here are the great men on their richly caparisoned mules, with their trotting cavalcade of servants and slaves; the priests in their high white turbans, carrying silver crucifixes wrapped in silk; debtors and creditors; mourners in their distinctive capes of blue and violet; ladies of quality, followed by their tiring women, with only their noses visible above the white bandages with which their faces are swathed, shopping on mule-back; gaping peasants; lepers and beggars; camels and donkeys; a jostling, restless, crazy cavalcade, regulated by cracks of hippopotamus whips wielded by policemen on point duty. A taxi hurtles by sounding its siren in one continuous blast. The penalty for manslaughter (if a man is knocked down by a taxi which has not sounded its siren) is death. A pair of magnificent greys strut along the main highway drawing a preposterous old hansom on the sides of which cling three or four excited Abyssinians. These are two of the Emperor's State horses being exercised. They are used on ceremonial occasions for drawing the Coronation Coach, formerly the property of Kaiser Wilhelm II. A superb Rolls-Royce, with a quaint

extension at the back for the Imperial Parasol-Holder, scatters the many groups which refuse to keep to the footpaths. Even the Emperor's motor-cars need airing when His Majesty is away.

A pitiful array of tin stores, kept by Indians, Greeks, Russians and Armenians, who eke out a miserable existence selling shoddy goods of Japanese and Czecho-Slovakian manufacture, line the main street. Suddenly in this strange jumble you see the words "Fresh Farm Eggs." Your eyes are not deceiving you, and, what is more, the eggs *are* fresh. The farm belongs to Colonel Sandford, brother of the Zeebrugge V.C., who has lived in Abyssinia for ten years. The farm does not pay, but latterly journalism has more than made up for the deficiencies of the former. Besides fresh farm eggs you can buy delicious strawberries at Colonel Sandford's all the year round, strawberries that almost rival the incomparable *fraises du bois*. I had a basketful of this exquisite fruit delivered to me every morning while I was at Addis Ababa.

In one or two of the better-class shops it is possible to buy curios to take home, silver Coptic crucifixes of genuine native manufacture, rhinoceros shields studded with sequins and semi-precious stones, cuff-links made out of Menelik threepenny bits, jewellery of delicate Armenian filigree-work, basket-work, wooden neck-pillows which the women use to prevent their elaborate head-dress from being disarranged, silver bracelets and ear-picks, illuminated manuscripts and modern Abyssinian paintings. I bought a number of the latter, but I discovered that it is best to wait for the artists themselves, as well as the pedlars of Coptic crucifixes and silver trinkets, to call at the hotel, where articles priced at thirty *thalers* in the bazaars could be secured, after prolonged bargaining, for three *thalers*.

It became a regular ritual in our daily lives at Addis

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Ababa to spend an hour each morning after breakfast receiving these callers who came from all parts of the capital as soon as the word went round that a stranger with many silver *thalers* in his trunks had arrived in their midst. These native artists make a modest living painting conventional scenes from Abyssinian history, the favourite subjects being the Legend of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, the storming of Magdala, and the Battle of Adowa. The latter, of which I was able to secure three very savage and realistic representations, had recently been forbidden by the Emperor as a subject for their brushes. These native paintings (see plates facing pages 246 and 247) exhibit a quaint sense of drawing and perspective, and an original, if not always æsthetic, use of colour. It is customary to paint all “good” people in full face with white faces, and all bad people in profile with black faces. Consequently in the Battle of Adowa pictures the Abyssinians are depicted as white and the Italians as black. The picture showing the Emperor Haile Selassie seeing an aeroplane for the first time (see plate facing page 247) is interesting because, in spite of so many heads being huddled closely together, the artist has contrived to convey a different expression of wonderment in each face. The Emperor, sitting under the State Canopy, in his astonishment has developed a slight squint, and one is reminded of the story of the Mad Mullah who, on seeing six R.A.F. aeroplanes approaching his fortress, thought they were chariots from Allah coming to take him to heaven. Donning his finest raiment, he awaited the celestial messengers seated under his white State Canopy. The Mullah escaped with his life and remarked to his followers : “I did not mind the birds. Their droppings fell on the top of my white canopy but could not touch me.”

The siege of Magdala is a favourite subject amongst



the native painters, for it gives them full scope for their love of crowds, drama, bloodshed, animals and guns. General Napier is depicted in the top right-hand corner of the picture almost twice the size of the other soldiers. The Emperor Theodore, in death as in life, seated beneath the State Umbrella, is in the act of committing suicide, and some of the 44 elephants used by the British Expedition to carry the Armstrong guns and 8" mortars are depicted at the bottom of the picture. The Abyssinians have always been impressed by the fact that the English were able to train elephants to work like mules, and Menelik once lamented : "We have many elephants here, but no one has ever trained them."

The Solomon legend is usually depicted in twenty-four episodes, opening with a characteristic dragon scene. This particular dragon lived in Tigré and was the terror of the countryside. One day a deputation of the people called on a warrior and offered to make him king if he killed the dragon. This shrewd chieftain, not desirous of emulating the methods of Saint George, poisoned a goat and offered the carcass to the dragon. The dragon obligingly ate it and died. The new king shortly became the father of Makeda, the Queen of Sheba. In due course a merchant from Jerusalem brought tales to the Queen of the wisdom and riches of King Solomon. The Queen of Sheba lost no time in sending off a letter accompanied by gifts of gold, spices and, in the modern representations of the legend, sacks of Marie Thérèse dollars. It is not recorded whether the Queen waited for a reply, but close on the heels of her envoy she set forth on her famous journey up the Red Sea. The meeting was eminently successful and Solomon gave a banquet in the Queen's honour, during which the ladies of Solomon's harem watched through a lattice. During the night the Queen felt thirsty, owing to the saltiness of

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the food at the banquet, and in her quest for water she found herself in Solomon's bedroom. In the final scenes the Queen is depicted with her entourage returning to her country, and lastly, the birth of a son, Menelik I, the founder of the present dynasty. It is usual for Solomon to be represented in the likeness of Menelik II or of the present Emperor, while the Queen of Sheba closely resembles the Empress Menen.

The religious pictures show a marked Italian influence, and this is particularly noticeable in the Madonna (see plate facing page 278). St. George, the patron Saint of Abyssinia, frequently figures in these allegorical paintings as well as in the frescoes in the churches. St. John is realistically portrayed in the act of losing his head, while blood spurts in great jets from his neck. The devil is variously represented as a child, a raven, or a weird animal with huge eyes and ears and its body covered with feathers.

Recently the Emperor has established an Imperial School of Art at Addis Ababa, and the principal, Agegnhou Ingida, who studied in Paris, is endeavouring to bring the standard of national painting to a higher level. Hitherto painting in Abyssinia was regarded as an hereditary craft, passed on from father to son. These artists owed their livelihood largely to the Church, painting and repainting the frescoes as they became obscured with dust or dim with age. When I visited Parliament House, Agegnhou Ingida and his pupils were busily engaged in painting frescoes depicting allegorical scenes in the Empire's history, wherein, even in medieval times, Abyssinian braves were depicted wearing khaki uniforms and vanquishing enemies armed with tanks, aeroplanes and heavy artillery.

I tried very hard to find one of the beautiful illuminated missals of which I had heard report before

leaving England, but I was only shown very ordinary and quite modern books of psalms with inferior illuminations. It is generally believed that the monasteries and churches of Abyssinia (many of which have never been visited by Europeans) contain many wonderful old books, including a number of apocryphal Gospels and apocryphal books of the Old Testament, of which there are no other copies in the world. Most of these are said to be written in Geez, the dead language of Abyssinia, and only understood by a few of the priests. At all the churches I visited I asked to see their books, but they invariably produced a few uninteresting tomes of no great antiquity and said they had no others. A rich field of exploration awaits the bibliophile with the money, the time and the enthusiasm—but most of all the money, for it is that which still carries most influence in Abyssinia to-day.

## CHAPTER XXII

### WAR CLOUDS

**A**DDIS ABABA in June basked in a noonday temperature of 95 degrees in the shade ; the Emperor, who still believed in God, guns, and Geneva (in decreasing geometrical ratio) was away at Jig Jigga, and life in the capital pursued its usual lethargic course. Outside the walls of the Foreign Office, the Italian Legation and the Imperial Radio Office there was little indication that Ethiopia was on the eve of the greatest crisis in its history. The peasants still wandered about the streets and stared at the Europeans (because they were the first white people they had seen), and the townspeople squatted (it is bad form to show any signs of physical exertion) in little groups in the market-place, at street corners, around the Menelik Memorial, and discussed the one great topic of the hour. Rain. Something had gone wrong with the seasons this year and the "little rains" which should have started six weeks before still showed no signs of breaking. This "truce of God," which in the south and the east and the north was making the enemy's preparations slow and tedious, was regarded by the lazy Ethiopians of Addis Ababa not as a gift of nature but the denial of their time-honoured rights.

At the Foreign Office overworked officials were toiling day and night translating and transmitting the Notes which passed almost hourly between Geneva and Addis Ababa. The other Government Departments could take things more easily when the Emperor was away, but not so the Foreign Office. One day I

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received a *communiqué* from George Herouy, the elder son of the Foreign Minister, denying a propagandist message which had been sent out from Rome. The message read as follows :

*An encounter on the Eritrean frontier between an Italian vice-brigadier and a native sergeant-major on the one side and a force of 400 heavily armed Ethiopians on the other has resulted in the complete rout of the latter. The clash occurred at Omarger, some 400 yards from the frontier at Setit, when the brigadier and sergeant-major came across the Ethiopians on Italian territory. The brigadier demanded that they withdraw. As they failed to accede to his demands, he took shelter behind an ant-hill and opened fire. He killed one man and the others fled. The brigadier has been warmly congratulated. Following the incident Italy has protested and is demanding damages.*

Actually this telegram had been sent out from Rome at least two months before and the only reason for drawing my attention to it at this late hour was, I concluded, to impress me with the absurdity of Count Ciano's propaganda methods and at the same time to remind me that I was not making full use of the Imperial Radio Office. Both reminders were entirely unnecessary, as I already had my own views about Count Ciano's propaganda methods, and I had had costly experience of Ethiopian telegrams.

The father of this George Herouy, His Excellency Belatin Getta Herouy, is one of the most remarkable men in Ethiopia. He has held the position of Foreign Minister for several years, a fact which speaks for itself as anyone acquainted with Ethiopian politics will confirm. He is the first person that every new arrival

in Addis Ababa is taken to see, and this strange old man with a short goatee beard and penetrating eyes that peer at you suspiciously from under thick grey eyebrows is always pleased to meet Europeans, for he has travelled extensively in Europe, America and Japan. Belatin Getta Herouy was born a slave, the son of a slave, and as a young man he worked in the humblest capacity as a servant of the Emperor Lej Yasu. One day Ras Tafari, then Governor of Harar, picked young Herouy out as a person through whom he could keep acquainted with the gossip of the Emperor's Court. Ras Tafari's confidence was not misplaced and the unfaithful slave proved a faithful spy—for another master. When Ras Tafari, with the help of the other Rases, drove Lej Yasu off the throne and appointed himself Regent, he did not forget the former slave. He appointed him, in due course, Foreign Minister. Herouy accompanied the Emperor when, as Ras Tafari, he visited Europe and the one-time slave walked and talked with the King and Queen of Italy, the President of France and the King and Queen of England. It is only in Ethiopia that things like that can happen.

"Does your Excellency think that war with Italy can be avoided?" I asked. Herouy senior sat between his two sons Sirak and George, the former having recently come down from Oxford, the latter from Cambridge. They are both leaders of the Young Ethiopia Movement. The Foreign Minister spoke slowly, as though measuring his words and a little uncertain of his English.

"I am an old man," he said, "and I have watched, and to the best of my ability have helped, the Emperor to guide this great nation of ours from the darkness into the light. No one knows better than I how much the Emperor has done, how he has worked with the energy of a hundred men, how he has toiled through

the nights as well as the days, grappling with problems which are handed over by less conscientious Sovereigns to their Ministers to solve. I am told that Mussolini fills most of the cabinet posts himself—nominally. Our Emperor fills them in more than name. Without his steady hand at the helm of Ethiopian affairs I tremble to think where our path would lead us. There is no one who could take his place. He is working too hard, so hard that we are anxious for his health. Your question, dear sir, is very difficult for me to answer. If war *can* be averted—if Mussolini can be persuaded of the folly, the madness of his schemes—it will only be by the efforts of our beloved Emperor. Our trust is in him, and in God.”

“And not in the League of Nations?” I asked.

“We still repose great faith in the League, but we believe even more implicitly in the friendship of England, because your country has always stood for justice, for the defence of the weak when they have been assaulted by the strong. There are wicked people in the world to-day who are saying that this is a struggle between black and white—” the old man’s eyes lit up as he brought down his fist on the desk—“I say it is a conflict between *right* and *wrong*. We do not ask the other nations of the world, more especially our friends within the League, to come out and fight for us. We are not frightened of our enemy, however better armed he may be than ourselves, and it is better, if war must come, that Ethiopia should face her enemy alone. But we do trust, in the worst extremity, that the civilized peoples of the world will judge this issue on its moral grounds and that they will have the courage to come forward and condemn those who have done wrong.”

“Does your Excellency not consider it possible,” I inquired, “for Ethiopia and Italy to work side by

side to develop the resources of your country, and to forward the reforms which your Emperor is working so hard to achieve but in which he is handicapped by lack of money and experienced Western counsellors? Think of the number of lives that will be perhaps uselessly sacrificed if a peaceful solution cannot be found!"

Belatin Getta Herouy hesitated a moment before replying. The question, I admit, was an impertinent one.

"We would do anything, within reason," he said, "to prevent our poor people from being bombed, gassed and murdered in their beds. But what price will we have to pay for peace? Would it not be better for us to go out and die in the defence of our rights and our liberty than to hoist the white flag and to spend the rest of our lives in slavery? Do you really believe that Italy would work side by side with us? Have you read Mussolini's latest speeches? What can Italy give us except roads, motor-cars, doctors and hospitals? We don't want Italian politics, Italian religion, Italian history, Italian morals. Have not our own sufficed for thousands of years?"

"And supposing Mussolini conquers Ethiopia?" I ventured.

"Mussolini will not have conquered Ethiopia while there is yet an able-bodied man, woman or child in the land who can take up his or her gun to resist the invaders. It will take him a long time to do that and it will be very expensive, perhaps too expensive, in Italian money and Italian blood. Perhaps Mussolini will wake up one day to find that his dream is not working out quite as he expected. . . ."

I was anxious to canvass as many views about the



war as possible while I was at Addis Ababa, and one day I went out to lunch with Sir Sidney and Lady Barton. No one, with the exception of the Emperor, has worked harder than the British Minister to find a solution of the problem, and it is well known that the Emperor has placed great faith in the advice of Sir Sidney Barton. He began by asking me my views. I said that I had seen enough in Eritrea and Italian Somaliland to convince me that war was inevitable and that furthermore Mussolini had made up his mind from the start to achieve his end by blood and not via Geneva.

"I am sorry to hear you say that," Sir Sidney replied, "because out here we cannot believe that Italy would wantonly endanger the peace of Europe because of a minor colonial incident like Wal Wal which was as much one side's fault as the other. We know that Italy was left out in the cold at Versailles and she is now suffering from overcrowding, but surely that does not mean that she is going to take up the sword and strike down a defenceless, harmless people like the Ethiopians? It is not in the nature of the Italian people to do a thing like that. Here our relationship with the Italians is so friendly. We are really like a big family. My elder daughter is married to Baron Muzzi, the Italian Consul at Debra Markos."

"How about the League of Nations?" I asked.

"If Mussolini is really in earnest and is determined to go ahead with this mad gamble the only hope is Geneva. If England and France stand firm, as I am sure they will, Mussolini will think again before ordering his troops across the frontier. If he commits a deliberate act of aggression he will have the whole weight of world opinion against him. Humanity will never tolerate the slaughter of innocent women and children in the name of colonial expansion. No, I am

certain that Mussolini is too shrewd a statesman to commit blunders of that sort."

The British Minister, like the Emperor, looked tired and far from strong. The altitude had affected his heart and I noticed, during our walk in the gardens of the Legation, that he breathed heavily on the slightest exertion. He hoped to go on leave in July, but owing to the grave turn of events he had had to cancel his holiday. Only those with the strongest constitution can stand the altitude of Addis Ababa more than a few years. General de Virgine, the Emperor's Swedish adviser, had suffered repeated heart attacks, and resigned his post a few weeks after I left the capital.

"We hear so much about Abyssinia's 'hidden wealth'; is there any truth in these stories about oil and gold and platinum?" I asked.

The British Minister smiled. "This country has always been a happy-hunting ground for speculators and concession-agents," he replied. "There is oil and gold and platinum here, of course, but most of the experts who have surveyed the possibilities tell me that minerals do not exist in sufficient quantities to make them a paying proposition. These gold reefs were known to the ancient Egyptians and for the last fifty years prospectors have been tapping the rocks to find them."

"Supposing Italy defies the League," I continued, "and Mussolini says to England and France: 'Very well, apply your sanctions,' what can we do? Our Army and Navy and Air Force are not strong enough to deter Mussolini. We have no power to close the Suez Canal, unless we are actually at war, and you will never get Englishmen to go out on another escapade of the Boer War type."

"You suggest therefore that the League of Nations is getting a bit creaky in the joints," the British Minister

replied, "and furthermore that England is really to blame for the present crisis?"

"Certainly, your Excellency. If we had built up a powerful Air Force three years ago and maintained our Fleet at its proper strength Mussolini would never have dared to utter the word 'war.' The people who have been preaching disarmament at home for years past will be the first to tell us to go to war when the Duce starts his campaign."

"It seems, then," continued Sir Sidney, "that we shall presently witness the collapse of the League of Nations and history will repeat itself as in the case of the Holy Alliance which was formed after Waterloo to put an end to war. That will be a terrible calamity. We must strive our utmost to prevent that. If there is no League of Nations every country will make a mad rush to rearm. Fear will stalk through the world, and it is Fear that makes war."

I had always wanted to hear the Italian viewpoint stated by an Italian who was unbiased and whose mind was not coloured one way or the other by the bellicose bawlings of the Fascist leader. It was an Italian who has lived for some years in Addis Ababa who supplied this for me, but for very good reasons I cannot disclose his name.

"The whole of the present trouble," he said, "has little to do with Mussolini, but dates practically entirely from Versailles. Perhaps it dates a little earlier than that, to Caporetto. That disaster was a terrible blow to Italian pride. Europe began to say that Italy had lost every war and won every peace. And the older generation had not forgotten Adowa. At Versailles, in the eyes of the world at that time, we got our just deserts. We did not win the peace. We had lost

nearly three-quarters of a million Italian lives in the war—and the territory we were promised was denied us. It was the hour for a Man to be born who would restore our national pride and rekindle that flaming patriotism which once made Rome the master of the world. Our Cæsar appeared in the guise of Benito Mussolini. He had all those little tricks of the theatre which appealed to our Latin fancy. He was arrested and then, by a stroke of sheer genius, he broke the Italian general strike of 1922. You Englishmen do not realize that Italy was on the verge of Communism at that time and that but for Mussolini we would now be under the heel of Moscow. Heaven knows where the invasion would have ended ! You know the rest of the story. The Fascists went from strength to strength. Mussolini was brutal, murderous, melodramatic, call it what you like—but he built up a new Italy which counted in the world, on the ashes of the old, pessimistic, inert Italy which has gone for ever. We all wondered at the achievements of this blacksmith's son who lived on fruit and coffee and by a series of brilliant moves healed the breach with the Vatican, built up the finest air force in the world, organized every department of State to the last pitch of efficiency, gave us an army equal to the Kaiser's before the war, and made his word felt in every Foreign Office in Europe. No wonder he electrified us, hypnotized us, ruled us heart and soul, like Napoleon did in France a hundred years before. He began to look around for fresh territory. He believed, rightly or wrongly, just as Hitler does, that power was impossible without numbers. He artificially stimulated our birth-rate. He had visions of a Roman Empire that would take in the whole of Eastern Africa. The doors of North and South America were locked against him. Libya proved fruitless. Eritrea and Italian Somaliland were about

as useful to Italy as Tasmania without Australia, or Victoria Island without British Columbia, to England. When we gazed up at these cool heights of Ethiopia we saw a land rich in possibilities, whose resources were known to us, and yet we were denied even a friendly co-operation in the development of those resources. Ethiopia's attitude has been a dog-in-the-manger one. If England had owned Eritrea and our strip of territory facing the Indian Ocean she would have extended her influence, if not her political and military control, into the heart of Ethiopia years ago. Look what we have done to show our friendly intentions towards Ethiopia—"it was forgivable for me to smile—"we sponsored their admission to the League of Nations, we concluded Treaties of Friendship to enable us to develop our territories side by side, we disregarded acts of aggression on our frontiers till our patience was strained to breaking-point. I am not pretending that it was these 'incidents' which brought matters to a head. Mussolini had made up his mind long before Wal Wal. Perhaps you might say that he could have set about his conquest in a less bullying fashion. He has committed diplomatic blunders by the score. We all know that. But Mussolini has no time for the finer points of diplomacy. He believes that the end will justify the means. If he has made a mistake, well——"

"But does he expect to conquer Ethiopia in six months," I interrupted.

"In less time than that," came the quick reply. "If he doesn't, our people will become restless at home. It is a gamble, of course, but plans have been worked out to the tiniest detail. If this fails, Mussolini falls—and if Mussolini falls, Italy is finished. Can't you see why every Italian in every part of the world is watching Ethiopia as if his own life's blood depends on it! It's all nonsense to say that Mussolini is swollen-headed

and that he is looking for colonial conquests to satisfy his greed for glory or to keep our minds off troubles at home. Italy's house is in order. We are prepared for any eventuality in Europe. Here in Africa we have found a likely outlet, the only outlet left, for our surplus millions, a market for our goods, and a source for our raw materials. Are we to be denied this, simply because England and France, possessors of vast colonial territories, do not want us to have a place in the sun? You English are greedy, sentimental and full of complacent self-esteem. You always stick up for the under-dog even when the under-dog is in the wrong. Just because Mussolini and Dictators in general don't appeal to your placid, Anglo-Saxon point of view you think that all Italians are good-for-nothing organ-grinders and cats'-meat mongers. Well, you are mistaken, and you won't have to wait very long to see that when Mussolini says a thing he means it!"

To be exact, only four months.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### WARRIORS IN PATENT LEATHER SHOES

ONE evening, when I was returning to the Hotel Imperial after discussing Abyssinian currency and drinking American cocktails with Mr. Colson, the Emperor's financial adviser, it began to rain. It rained for about ten minutes. Then it began to pour. It poured for about ten minutes and then it began to hail. It hailed for about ten minutes and then the clouds began to burst. When a cloud bursts over Addis Ababa it makes a noise like a naval bombardment. The hailstones, which thunder down on the zinc roofs like shrapnel, are as large as golf-balls, smash the windcreens of cars and kill donkeys. There was still a heap of them outside the hotel the next morning, and they were being gathered up to make ice-cream.

Everybody said that the "Little Rains" had begun and Monsieur Mendrakas rubbed his hands together in satisfaction. "The Italian aeroplanes will not come till October," he said.

"What will you do if there is an air raid?" I asked.

"The Emperor is having dug-outs made," he said, "and the natives are being instructed to make for the open country as soon as the warning is sounded."

The "Little Rains" lasted for twelve hours. But that was just long enough to turn the streets into raging torrents of mud and to awaken the populace from its midsummer siesta. The squatting groups and gaping villagers had gone slightly mad. They had torn off their *chammas* to the waist and were dancing and

singing deliriously in the centre of the streets. Their hilarity, however, was short-lived. As soon as they realized that the rains had not begun in earnest they returned to their street corners, squatted and continued to stare.

Down by the station a rough piece of ground had been turned into a parade ground. A tumbledown tin shed served as recruiting office. It was almost pathetic to watch these undisciplined natives forming fours and two deep, some in white *chammas*, grey sombreros and patent leather shoes, others in faded khaki tunics and white jodhpurs, laughing and talking, and interpreting the words of command according to their own inclinations.

"Most of them are out of step," Colonel Sandford remarked to me, "but there is a danger of these Abyssinians being over-trained and their natural fighting instincts consequently stifled. European drill is all very well for Europeans, but too much of it for natives may produce a kind of "tactical arthritis." The chief hope these fellows have is in their guerrilla tactics. A handful of Abyssinians with a machine-gun cunningly concealed could be very troublesome to a thousand well-equipped European troops. The trouble is, they haven't enough machine-guns."

Some of these recruits were only fourteen years of age, but as no order for general mobilization had been issued they had joined up purely on their own initiative. The idea of a boy of fourteen being made to shoulder a rifle and practise arms drill and go for long route marches (in bare feet) sounds a little barbaric to English minds, but not so to Abyssinians. Some of these boys become soldiers at twelve. They have yearned to become soldiers (instead of engine-drivers or bus-conductors) from the time they have learned to speak. It is in their blood. By the time they have



reached the age of twenty-five, they have passed their prime. Disease takes its toll in Abyssinia. I was told by a Swedish doctor that seventy-five per cent of the people are syphilitic and that the average age of mortality is between forty-five and fifty. Blindness or partial blindness is such a common sight that one takes no special notice of it. The Emperor has already spent a considerable part of his personal fortune in building hospitals and having students trained in Europe, but the money which he had set aside for that purpose has now been swallowed up in buying munitions. Healing must now give place to killing.

"What do these soldiers get paid?" I asked Colonel Sandford. I had been told that Haile Selassie, like Charles II, sometimes forgot about paying his troops for two or three years.

"The Imperial Guard, consisting of 6,000 picked and trained men, get five shillings a month," I was informed. "They have to keep themselves and their families on this amount, but it is not such a squeeze as it may sound. Living expenses for an Abyssinian are very small. The Emperor, who pays the men out of his own pocket, cannot afford to pay them more because he needs all the money he can raise for buying rifles and ammunition. Addis Ababa has been full of arms speculators and agents for months past—Belgian, German, French, Swiss and Czecho-Slovakian. Most of them go away empty-handed because the Emperor cannot afford to pay. Lately he has been offering payment in coffee and mineral and oil concessions. This question of ammunition may be the deciding factor in the war."

"What arms have the Abyssinians got?"

"An obsolete tank presented to the Emperor by the Duke of Abruzzi, four or five thousand machine-guns

and pom-poms, a few old cannon captured at Adowa, and two or three dozen light mountain guns."

"And aeroplanes?"

"Five, three of which are in working order and used by the Emperor for his own private purposes. Fifteen three-engined Fokkers are expected to arrive shortly, but there is no Abyssinian Air Force at present to fly them. What is needed much more than aeroplanes is a Red Cross organization. These Abyssinians are as tough as nails but the wounded will just be left on the battlefields to be devoured by the hyenas."

The more I saw of these primitive preparations for war, the more I realized what a hopeless task lay before the Emperor. We heard that man-traps were being built by tribesmen in remote districts, where men prefer to fight hand to hand with swords and daggers to rifles and machine-guns. Others were going to face the enemy armed with pitchforks and farm implements. Holes were being dug in the ground to store grain outside all the towns and villages. The Emperor and Empress, it was said, would be with the troops on the battlefield to encourage the soldiers in the defence of their fatherland. As it was anticipated that the offensive would be launched by the Italians on several fronts simultaneously it was being arranged for "impersonators" of the Emperor to serve the dual purpose of encouraging the troops and drawing the enemy's fire, to lead each army into action. The women would go too. The bodies of the dead soldiers were to be picked up and used as shields against the enemy's gunfire. Most remarkable of all the stories we heard, however, concerned a particularly savage tribe in the north, who proposed to precede their attack on the enemy by a charge of wild buffalo, the beasts being worked up to a mad frenzy beforehand by specially prepared fodder.

The European community regarded all these rumours and preparations with an amused, almost fatalistic air of resignation. With the Emperor away at Jig Jigga nobody knew what was happening on the frontiers. The diplomatic ding-dong continued according to plan (Mussolini's plan of playing for time) at Geneva. The plague of Special Correspondents had not yet begun. One or two of the London newspapers were beginning to make preparations, and Colonel Sandford signed a fresh contract, with a handsome retainer. One day Richard Halliburton, the *enfant terrible* of American journalism, arrived at Addis Ababa. He was planning to cross the Alps on an elephant, like Hannibal, and looked in at Addis Ababa to see if the fun had begun. He decided that it was too early and went on to Marseilles where his elephant was awaiting him. Count Vinci, the Italian Minister, who had the most difficult role of anybody to play in Abyssinia, continued to give the best parties in the town. I met him only once, and all he would discuss was racing. Every Saturday afternoon the British Legation played polo. The merchants and tradespeople complained, as they had done for many years past, of acute financial constipation. The two cinemas which functioned between the hours of 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. continued to do good business. The cafés and bars and the solitary night-club were filled with sleepy Russians, Greeks and Armenians, who would have welcomed an Italian invasion because it would have meant a revival of trade. At the Imperial Club, members of the Legation staffs drank American cocktails, looked at the last number of *The Tatler*, and solemnly agreed that Miss Esmé Barton was the most attractive girl in all Addis Ababa. When they heard that I was a journalist they said: "We hope you will say nicer things about us than Evelyn Waugh did."

## WARRIORS IN PATENT LEATHER SHOES

In the market, the one great centre of activity in Addis Ababa, life continued as usual. It was here more than anywhere else in the Empire that one saw the great racial problem of Abyssinia which Haile Selassie is slaving so hard to solve. There were Gallas, Amharis, Tigreans, Shankalis, Falasha (the black Jews), Danakils, Hararis, and Somalis. Many of them hate one another bitterly, but they are all members of the great Empire of Ethiopia. Although Haile Selassie has gone a long way already towards pacifying the disturbing elements within his realm it may be that Mussolini's lust for territory and revenge will unite all these peoples in one supreme endeavour to defend their rivers and mountains and valleys from the common foe.

The Falasha are an interesting people, numbering about 50,000, who live in the neighbourhood of Gondar, the old capital. It is not known how these black Jews got cut off from the main body of their kinsmen centuries ago, but to-day, sixteen centuries after Ethiopia accepted Christianity, these people still live by the laws of Moses. One theory is that (the word "Falasha" meaning "expelled" in Amharic), these people withdrew to the country around Gondar to escape the persecution of the Christians. In the tenth century, Judith, widow of the King of the Falasha, after killing off practically every member of the House of Solomon, succeeded in establishing herself as Empress of Abyssinia. She reigned for forty years and founded the Zague line of Kings, some of whom turned Christian, but another 300 years elapsed before the Solomon line was restored. In Addis Ababa there is a school for the children of the Falasha families who are in the service of the Emperor.

The history of the Gallas is likewise wrapped in mystery. They are believed to have arrived in Ethiopia

about the middle of the sixteenth century, and to have had their beginnings in Southern Arabia. In Arabic the word "Galla" means "barbarian." They number about four millions and the women are very slender and beautiful. The other Abyssinian races say that the Gallas are descended from a shameless Abyssinian princess and a Gurage slave, who had seven sons, all of whom were murderers. The Amharis, with whom the Gallas have intermarried (the two races hating one another fiercely at the same time) number nearly three millions. They regard themselves as the aristocracy of Abyssinia and hold most of the important positions in the Empire. They are detested, consequently, by all the races of Abyssinia.

In the market-place, however, old feuds and jealousies are, for the moment, forgotten. There is other and more important business afoot. If you are able to stand the noise and the smell and the flies, you will find that there is a certain degree of order in all this chaos. There is the meat market, where the flies are so numerous that the meat looks black, and the babies, fastened in slings to the backs of their mothers, are pestered by these creatures till they scream with pain. In the gun and ammunition market, a lively trade is in progress, for every self-respecting Abyssinian carries his gun. It does not matter very much whether the gun will fire, it is the appearance of the thing that matters. In the parasol market you can buy absurd little contraptions of straw and bamboo, shaped like a mushroom and about the size of a plate, which the women carry, ostensibly to shield their heads from the sun, but in actual practice they are far too small for that purpose. The clothes market is perhaps the most flourishing of all, and here you may buy garments ranging from the simple white *chammas* (made in Japan) to the most elaborate capes costing



(Left) An Abyssinian Chief  
(Centre and Right) Abyssinian Warriors



Abyssinian belles at Addis Ababa

£50, made of cloth of gold and brocaded velvet ornamented with sequins, Marie Thérèse dollars and semi-precious stones. The women elbow each other in front of the stalls, feeling the quality of the cottons and the velvets, and behaving with the same disregard for each other's persons as their cousins in the bargain basements of Europe.

In the camel market I observed, for the first time, that camels have faces like human beings. I intend no offence either to camels or to human beings by this remark. They have intelligent faces and their expressions are constantly changing. Usually they look slightly bored. Sometimes they affect a look of quiet resignation at their sad lot or an amused philosophy about their own ludicrous appearance. Every camel, too, has quite a different face. I was told by one of the camel-dealers that these beasts provide the cheapest and the surest method of transport in the world. They can go for weeks without water if they are not working and the grazing is good. They must be allowed water every ten days, when working, in order to keep up their daily mileage. They live on thorn or scrub (even boulders, if you let them) according to what the country provides. Their thick leathery lips are so designed as to extract the last digestible morsel from the clumps of natural barbed-wire with which the plains and valleys of Abyssinia are covered.

The Abyssinians, I regret to say, are shamefully cruel to their animals. You see mules and donkeys disgracefully overloaded and their backs are covered with open sores where ill-fitting saddles and harness, often not removed for months, have rubbed against their flesh. As a rule they dislike killing their animals and leave them to die by the roadside. Their death, however, is not a lingering one, for the hyenas soon make their appearance and put a quick if brutal end



to the animal's sufferings. The Abyssinian poultry dealers think nothing of carrying round half a dozen hens, hanging head downwards with their feet tied together, throwing them down on the hot and dusty footwalks where they can be trodden on, and where they are handled during the day by dozens of people, who feel their crops to assess their value. I once mentioned this cruelty to animals to the Emperor, who is noted for his love of dogs, and he said it would take a long time to change the people's ideas about these things but he had visions one day of establishing a S.P.C.A. in Abyssinia.

I had been told that one could still see the marriage market taking place amongst the noise, the smell and the turmoil of this huge open-air emporium, but latterly this interesting department has been prohibited. For a European it is a simple matter, as at Djibuti, Mogadiscio, Harar and other places I had visited, to form an alliance, temporary or otherwise, with any of the exquisite native girls of the town. The parents are often only too glad to sell their daughters. The girls themselves are eager to find a European "husband" but they are not over-anxious to form permanent attachment with young men of their own colour. They prefer the free and easy life of "trial marriages," changing their husband, like a hat or a frock, as often as they please.

There are three kinds of marriage in Abyssinia, the "trial" marriage, civil marriage and religious marriage. In the trial marriage the husband selects his bride, there is no kind of ceremony, and the two go and live together. The husband supplies his bride with pin-money and when they begin to tire of each other they separate. In the civil marriage, a ceremony is performed before the Mayor and a legal contract is drawn up assessing the properties of the two parties

and determining the division of these properties in the event of divorce. Divorce in Addis Ababa is a simple affair for the rich, and consequently a woman who has had two or three husbands becomes a very desirable investment if her previous husbands have endowed her well with worldly goods. The third kind of marriage corresponds to our own, but is usually only entered into by members of the upper classes. The Church pronounces its blessing on these unions and no divorce is recognized.

The Emperor, contrary to report, only has the one wife. Menelik had four wives, but only one at a time. During my stay in Abyssinia I heard no whisper of scandal concerning the name of Haile Selassie.

I was sorry about the marriage market, and from a purely morbid point of view I was also disappointed to hear that public hangings have been abolished and that the last gibbet tree had been cut down just before the coronation to make way for the gilt equestrian figure of Menelik.

"You should have been here a month or two ago," a Greek in one of the cafés remarked to me. "The trouble about Haile Selassie is that he is Westernizing the country so quickly that soon we shall have no picturesque customs left. Now we are only waiting for Mussolini's bombs and poison-gas to complete the work of civilization."

"What should I have seen a month or two ago?" I inquired. It was annoying to think that I had arrived too early for the Roman legions and too late for the last barbaric rites of the Ethiopian Empire. I wondered what it could be. The Greek explained.

"A few years ago," he began, "it was the custom for a person who had been convicted of murder or manslaughter to be handed over to the relatives of the deceased, who were entitled to put him to death

in the exact manner of the murder itself. Thus, if a man had run over another man and killed him, the widow was privileged to run over the man convicted of the manslaughter of her husband. This form of death-sentence has now been abolished, but the relatives of the deceased are still entitled to shoot the murderer or, if they prefer, to accept blood money from the relatives or friends of the assassin. Two months ago a well-known local character, a Galla, was convicted of the murder of an old man to whom he owed money. It was commonly suspected that he had committed half a dozen murders in his time. A great crowd followed the execution party down to the sheds near the station. Among them were some influential friends of the murderer who bargained with the relatives of the deceased up till the moment they entered the execution shed. Half an hour went by and we still heard no shot. But the shouting continued and it was evident that blood money was still being asked, but the family of the dead man wanted too much. Dollar by dollar it went up, till the murderer's friends could go no further. They offered £150, but it was not enough. A shot rang out and presently the friends of the murderer appeared, carrying the dead body under a sheet to where a grave had been dug close by. The bereaved family, who had now carried out their revenge, went away up the hill laughing and shouting. It was the most exciting event in Addis Ababa since the Coronation."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE OLDEST CHRISTIAN CHURCH

I AM often asked about the religion of the Abyssinians, and I always answer this rather vague inquiry in the words of Menelik, who said that Ethiopia had been "a rock of Christians in a desert of pagans for fourteen centuries." The Abyssinians themselves claim that theirs is the oldest Christian denomination in the world, and they have reasonable grounds for making this assertion. So much of their early history is wrapped up in myth and legend that it is difficult to get at the truth of the beginnings of their Church. To-day one sees many diverse influences at work in their ceremonies and beliefs, Pagan, Christian and Jewish, which suggest contacts, at different periods of the Church's history, with almost every branch of Faith. Although they pray before ikons, like the Russians, their crosses, which every Christian wears round his neck, never display the figure of Christ, for, as Father Francisco Alvarez noted in 1520: "On no cross is a crucifix painted, neither have they any of solid carving because they say they are not deserving to see Christ crucified." The devout Christians always prostrate themselves on the ground when passing a Church, and at the same time they observe the Mohammedan laws concerning food. In the same Catholic spirit they revere the Jewish Sabbath as well as the Christian Sunday. They keep the Feast Days and the Fasts of both the Roman and the Greek Churches, and the priests dance before the Ark of the Covenant as David did. The Abuna, who is head of the Coptic Church in Ethiopia,

and second in importance to the Emperor, has always been appointed by the Patriarch of Alexandria, and is never an Abyssinian by birth.

Historians are fairly consistent on one point, namely that Christianity was first introduced into Ethiopia in the early part of the fourth century. Two Christian boys named Eudes and Frumentuis were said to have been shipwrecked in the Red Sea and were brought to the Abyssinian Court as slaves. They so impressed the King with their stories of Christian Faith that, in due course, Frumentuis was appointed Secretary to the King, and on the King's death he became Regent. He then set about building churches and spreading the Christian faith through the land. He visited St. Athanasius at Alexandria and the Patriarch appointed him the first Bishop of Axum, the sacred city of Ethiopia, where the original Ark of the Covenant is believed to be buried.

Between the fourth and sixteenth centuries the history of Ethiopia, which is closely bound up in the history of its Church, is lost in antiquity. There were wars and battles, pretenders and palace poisonings, and a few months before the birth of Mohammed the Abyssinians were defeated outside Mecca. In the tenth century the Falasha established their Jewish dynasty and it was at this period that the marvellous rock-hewn churches of Lalibala were built. One day I hope to return to Ethiopia, under more peaceful auspices, to see these remarkable remains. There are eleven of these churches hewn out of the solid rock and the largest, dedicated to the Saviour of the World, stands in a courtyard which is itself hollowed out of rock and measures 109 feet in length and 76 feet in width. The walls are nearly seven feet in thickness, and it is said that the ceilings, windows and doorways are delicately chiselled and of great beauty.

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The first contact of the Abyssinian Church with the Church of Rome came during the reign of Constantine I, in the middle of the fifteenth century. The Venetian painter Francisco di Branca-Leone was received by the Abyssinian king, who, with the approval of the Patriarch of Alexandria, sent a mission to Rome. Eugene IV was then Pope, but it was Pope Julius III who, at the suggestion of Ignatius Loyola, sent the first Jesuit missionaries to Ethiopia. They do not appear to have met with much success, for Claudius I, then King of Ethiopia, refused to see them and wrote his famous confession of faith. About this time travellers returning from the East related wondrous tales of a land whose rivers flowed with gold, ruled over by a Priest-King, Prester John. The King of Portugal sent two explorers to find this promised land and its legendary monarch, one of whom was captured and killed, the other remaining for thirty years in accordance with the law of that country that no stranger, once he had set foot in Ethiopia, was allowed to depart. In the sixteenth century the tide of Islam poured across Ethiopia and long periods of bloodshed ensued. Eventually the Portuguese sent aid to the unarmed Christians and the armies of Mohammed Gran were routed. A Jesuit mission accompanied the Portuguese army, and by the beginning of the seventeenth century a King of Ethiopia had been converted to Rome, but he was excommunicated by his own people and banished.

In 1632 the Jesuits were expelled from Abyssinia and little more of their activities is recorded till the nineteenth century, when King John caused all the missionaries in the country to be expelled with the exception of one Roman Catholic priest who was allowed to remain as an example of the wickedness of European priests. The number of his illegitimate children was legion. When the Jesuits failed the Pope

decided to send Franciscans and French Capuchins, and it was under the latter that Haile Selassie received his early education. Whether Rome will renew her efforts to claim the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Church is doubtful, and at the same time it is certain that the present state of affairs will make Mother Church's chances in that direction more remote than ever.

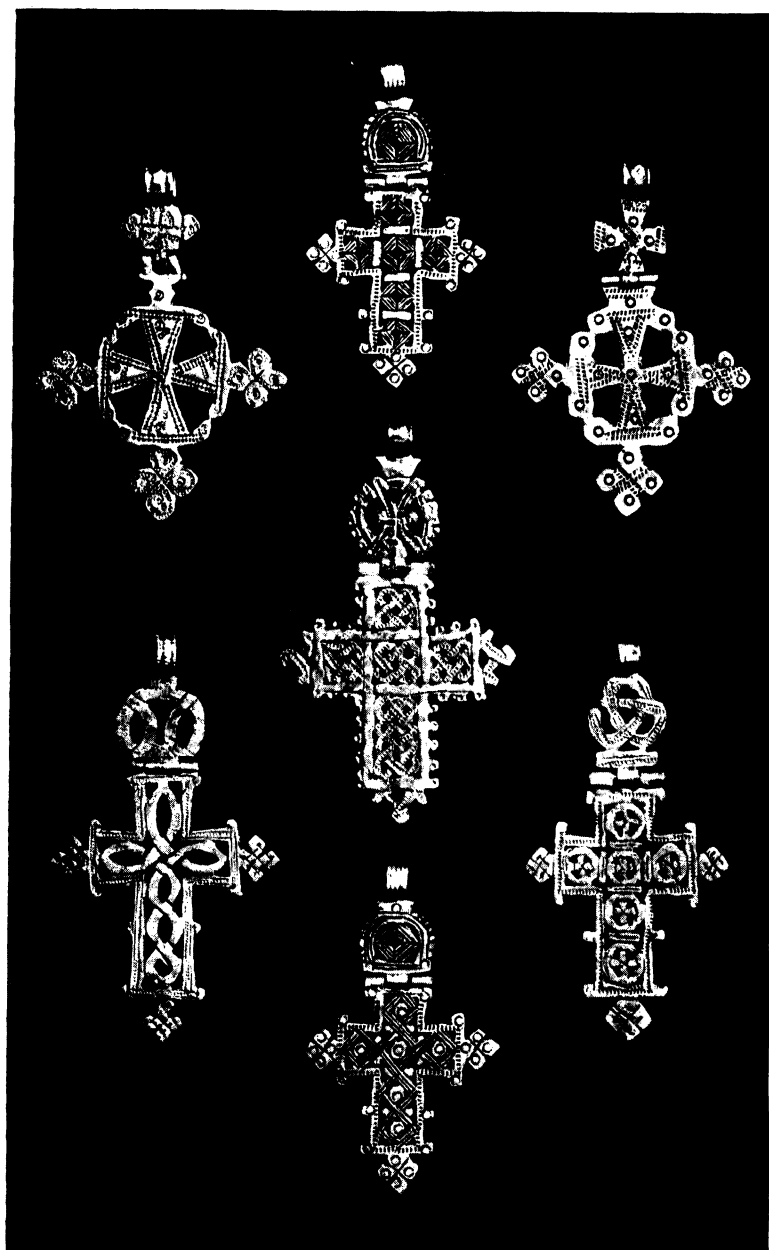
The power of the Church in Ethiopia to-day is indisputable. The Emperor, however, is too shrewd to run counter to the powerful priesthood, and the Empress Menen maintains a strict and devout adherence to the Church's wishes. The Abuna Kyrillos, an Egyptian monk, who corresponds to the Archbishop of Canterbury, is a man of great piety and prefers the company of his books to meddling in the affairs of State. In other ways the position of Church and State resembles the state of affairs existing in the days of Henry II and Thomas à Becket. The priests already have the Emperor Lej Yasu in their keeping and they would dearly like to have a closer hold over Haile Selassie. The Emperor does not forget that there are nearly two million priests and monks in Abyssinia, and many of these are armed. He observes the Fasts prescribed by the Church most rigorously and never fails to appear, in spite of the pressure of State business, on the great Feast Days when the services begin as early as 4 a.m. He gives large sums of money to the Church and at the same time encourages foreign missionaries, providing they restrict their activities to education and medical work. Addis Ababa is full of missions representing every belief and denomination under the sun. They do some good and cause a certain amount of amusement to the rest of the European community. The Swedish Missions, which are largely educational and medical, do a great deal of good in the land, and my "boy," "Ras" Makonnen, was in



### Madonna and Child

From the painting by a native artist in the collection  
of the Author





Silver Coptic Crosses designed and made by native craftsmen

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every way a worthy product of the Swedish Mission at Harar.

“Are the natives themselves religious?” I am asked. My answer is that the Church in Abyssinia plays much the same part as the cinema in England. They all wear a little silver cross round their necks and they love the colour and the ceremonial of the Church services, while the priests themselves, in their rich vestments and gold and silver crowns, pay due attention to the emotional appeal of colour in all the Church’s festivals. Although a great number of the people are quite illiterate, they learn the Psalms by heart. The Church imposes many fasts and penances and the people observe these scrupulously. Most of all, the people like the great Festivals which take place on the last day of each month. I had the good fortune to witness one of these before I left Addis Ababa.

The ceremony took place at the ungodly hour of 4 a.m., at the Cathedral of St. Gorgis. We arrived at the church nearly half an hour before the service was due to begin, but already a large crowd of natives and soldiers, some squatting, others lounging in little groups under the trees, were gathered outside in the darkness. There was no buzz of conversation and a devotional silence prevailed amongst the waiting worshippers. In the ordinary way the Emperor would have attended the ceremony but he was still away in the South and the service, we were informed, would therefore be stripped of much of its usual ceremonial. Across the entrance to the Cathedral a large white sheet was stretched and only the priests and monks were allowed to enter the sacred doorway. It was cold and cheerless standing outside at that hour of the morning and I wondered at the great number of people who had left the warmth of their beds to observe the Feast. A few minutes before the service began a

number of monks carrying flaming torches appeared on the steps of the Cathedral and they proceeded to the corners of the open space which had been kept clear in front of the church. The flickering light cast strange dancing patterns on the faces of the people, and gave the scene a weird illumination, as if we were assembled there to participate in some barbaric sacrifice to heathen gods.

Suddenly our eyes were directed towards the church door. A bell, of peculiarly metallic note, rang out somewhere up in the trees. The sheet had now been drawn aside and a heavy smell of incense drifted across the square. Presently through the dark doorway a procession of young monks, some in white *chammas*, others in brown cloaks like blankets, appeared, carrying crude stringed instruments and long wooden crutches with ivory and brass tops elaborately carved. There must have been twenty of these young monks and they were followed by priests and dignitaries clad in richly embroidered vestments of green and gold, with tall turbans on their heads, their expressions inscrutable, their skins like crinkled parchment. The monks squatted on the ground while the priests, some thirty or forty in number, took their places in rows facing each other around the entrance to the Cathedral. There was another short pause before two monks, rather older than the others, appeared at the steps carrying on their heads a sacred burden whose nature was hidden from our gaze by heavy silk coverings, bordered with gold tassels. This coverlet is known as the *Maggwonatsafia*. The monks moved slowly forward and the crowd of worshippers in the square prostrated themselves to the ground. "Ras" Makonnen whispered to me that these were the stones on which were inscribed the Ten Commandments. A group of tiny acolytes, grave and wondering-eyed, in

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white *chammas*, chanting ancient hymns in a high treble, followed closely on the heels of the two monks, and they in turn were followed by the Bishops, more gorgeously appavelled than the others and wearing crowns of gold and silver on their heads.

There was another pause and then, in startling contrast to the glittering copes and tiaras of the bishops and the priests who had gone before, a solitary figure, bearded and venerable with age, with the look of Moses in his eyes, stood at the doorway of St. Gorgis. He wore a simple black cloak with long flowing sleeves and in his hand he clasped a delicately wrought silver cross wrapped in silk. "The Abuna," whispered "Ras" Makonnen. The aged Patriarch moved slowly down the steps and took his place on an improvised throne to the right of the entrance.

The service had now begun. The torches which had given added glamour to this exotic scene were extinguished as the first streaks of dawn appeared and one of the young acolytes began to recite holy writ in a quick gabbling fashion holding a large brown book. Even "Ras" Makonnen could not make out what he was saying, and presently a second boy, with his face turned towards the Abuna, went through the same performance. I discovered afterwards that these gabbled readings were the Epistle and the Gospel.

When the second boy had completed his contribution to the ceremony the monks who were squatting around the two standing figures bearing the tables of stone began a strange music on their stringed instruments, while three of their brethren beat time on drums hidden from our view. One of the priests carrying a heavy book in his hands now advanced to the feet of the Abuna and began a melancholy chant which seemed to come rather from the nose than from the throat. It lasted for a very long time and my own impious

thoughts were beginning to stray in the direction of bacon and eggs. It was now broad daylight and the heavy brocades and silks looked a little faded and worn in the harsh glare of the early morning. At the conclusion of the solo psalmist, the priests who carried long crutches in their hands began a slow rhythmic dance to the strains of the stringed instruments and the slow, sonorous booms of the drums. One priest acted as leader in this strange ballet and the others followed his movements, filling the air with hideous nasal sounds which increased in volume as the music grew wilder, the dance more ecstatic.

I noticed that members of the crowd were shaking little silver rattles in time with the beating of the drums and were swaying their bodies backwards and forwards like the priests with their crutches. Suddenly, without any warning, the whole *fantasia* abruptly ended, the procession re-formed, the priests disappeared inside the church and the crowds melted away down the hill to Addis Ababa. It was just as if the producer at a rehearsal of a new play had suddenly looked at his watch, remembered that he had an appointment, and had stopped the show in the middle of Act II and told the company to assemble at three o'clock the following afternoon.

## CHAPTER XXV

### WHO WILL WIN ?

**M**Y stay in Abyssinia was drawing to a close and any day now I expected a telegram from Northcliffe House recalling me home. The heavy rains were almost due and they would continue until the end of September. It would be impossible to go up to the frontiers, either to Ogaden or Tigré, even supposing that the Emperor gave his permission. For the next three months the frontiers lay in London, Paris and Rome. Addis Ababa would retire within its *tukals* and listen to the monotonous music of the rains on the zinc roofs until the great Feast of Maskaram at the end of September.

I went up to my verandah, got out my maps and notes and tried to work out the probable course of this astonishing war, which now seemed imminent and inevitable. At the top of my notes, begun at Massowah in March, I had scribbled the words "War in October." It suggested a possible title for my book. It was the catchword on the lips of every Italian with whom I spoke : "Nothing will happen until October." Here at Addis Ababa it was obvious that nothing could happen until October. It was clear too that Mussolini would have to break the back of his campaign between October and May. In other words he would have to smash the Abyssinian defences in the north and south, and occupy Addis Ababa and Harar, the two key cities of the Empire, within the space of eight months. How was he proposing to set about this gigantic task,

so gigantic a task that Napoleon himself might have thought twice about undertaking it?

The conclusions and ideas here set forth are those of an amateur strategist, who knows little of the art of warfare, and although he had exceptional opportunities for studying the situation on the spot, and on both sides of the frontiers, he was unable to obtain much enlightening information as to the probable plans of the Italian campaign. He had many discussions, however, with European critics, soldiers and civilians, who were well acquainted with the geography and topography of Abyssinia and its surrounding territory, and upon these discussions, and his own observations, aided by a close study of the map, he bases his theories.

At the outset it can be taken as certain that the Italians, with Marshal de Bono in command in Eritrea, and General Graziani in command in Somaliland, will launch their offensive on two fronts, separated by nearly 2,000 miles of sea between the two chief ports of Massowah and Mogadiscio. Although every effort was made in both these colonies to *prevent* me from seeing what I had been sent there to see with Mussolini's own approval, I observed without moving more than a few yards from the hotel at Asmara and Massowah in Eritrea, and Mogadiscio in Somaliland, that preparations were being carried out on such a scale that there could be no reasonable doubt as to the Duce's intentions. It is known that Mussolini sent Marshal Badoglio at the head of an Italian military mission to Eritrea as far back as July 1934, to investigate and report upon the prospects of a campaign against Abyssinia. The Duce had reckoned that 80,000 men would suffice with an expenditure in the neighbourhood of two million lire a month. The report of Marshal Badoglio was discouraging. It hinted that 400,000 men would be necessary and the expenditure would be corres-

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pondingly greater. Mussolini is said to have torn up the report in a fury. Nevertheless, he appears to have been guided by the suggestions put forward by these experts.

It was impossible for me to arrive at any exact figure of the number and disposition of the troops which were pouring down the Red Sea to Massowah and Mogadiscio in March, April, May and June, but it was evident that a much greater force was being assembled in Eritrea. The ratio to those being assembled in Somaliland was probably two to one. Assuming that the same rate of transport was maintained up till the end of September (allowing for the monsoons at Mogadiscio which had necessitated the development of Bendir Cassim as an emergency port and the building of roads from there to the frontier and to Mogadiscio), my informants calculated that the offensive would be begun with 150,000 troops in the north, and 80,000 in the south. These would be divided up as follows: In Eritrea, four Regular Divisions, four Blackshirt Divisions and two Native Divisions; in Somaliland, one Regular Division and one Native Division. In addition to the fighting forces there would also be a Labour Corps, consisting of 30,000 engineers and road-makers in Eritrea, and another 10,000 in Somaliland.

Reports varied considerably as to the number of aeroplanes and personnel of the *Regia Aeronautica* in the two colonies, but it was generally considered that at least 600 bombers would be used in the campaign, most of these being located at Asmara and Assab in Eritrea, and at Garoe and Rocca Littorio in Somaliland. There are two schools of thought as to the part the aeroplane will be able to play in a campaign against Abyssinia. Those who contend that the air arm will be the predominant factor support their claims with



arguments that the Italian planes will be able to drop 600 tons of high explosives per day, striking terror into the hearts of unsophisticated tribesmen, while tactical encircling from above would force the terrified natives into a vast concentration, thereby enabling the bombers to execute a massacre of ghastly proportions. They say too that troop-carriers would be used for rushing up men and machine-guns to isolated positions where the guerrilla tactics of the enemy were holding up the advance of the main body.

The answer to some of these arguments can be found by glancing at the map. Again I speak as an amateur, but I know from personal acquaintance with the conditions and topography of Abyssinia that there are no arsenals or factories or lines of communication (excepting, of course, the French Railway) which would constitute vital targets for the Italian bombs. There are thousands of villages up and down the country, made of straw and mud and cow-dung, which would spring up again the next morning. Addis Ababa, as I have already indicated, has a large neutral European population and presumably even Mussolini would pause before destroying English, French and Belgian non-combatants. It is not unlikely, too, that the bombs would fall on a deserted city because ample warning would be given of the approach of the enemy aircraft and the townspeople would rapidly scatter towards the hills and surrounding country.

There is another and very strong argument against the value of air warfare in Abyssinia. The greater part of the country is mountainous, ranging from 2,000 to 14,000 feet. Except at Harar, Addis Ababa and Makale, there are no aerodromes in the European sense of the word. I am assured by experts that forced landings in a country like Abyssinia would result, in nine cases out of ten, fatally. The possibilities of being

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able to rush up air supplies are therefore slender and remote. For long-distance bombing raids—Addis Ababa is nearly 400 miles from the Eritrean frontier—the Duce's bombers would have to carry a reduced load of bombs on account of the fuel required for a long flight as well as the necessity to fly at a great altitude to cross the mountains. It is highly unlikely that the Abyssinian armies would congregate in large numbers to offer a target for the enemy's bombs. It is much more certain that after the first shock of an aerial attack the tribesmen would adapt themselves to this new condition of warfare, discovering ways and means of hiding themselves from the view of the reconnoitring planes. The brownish red of the Abyssinian mountains and valleys, with its scant covering scrub and thorn and boulders, affords excellent of camouflaging opportunities for these wily warriors.

The Italian Navy's part in the Abyssinian war can be dismissed at once as negligible. There are no Abyssinian ports to blockade. If Italy declares that part of the Red Sea opposite Eritrea a "war zone," claiming the right to search all vessels suspected of carrying arms for the besieged Empire, she will immediately raise questions of international law and at the same time lay herself open to grave risks of having the Suez Canal closed against her. Mussolini is not likely to make a mistake of that kind. The Italian sailors with whom I spoke at Massowah were anxious to do their bit and hinted at the formation of a naval brigade, to act as signallers and artillery and machine-gun units, but again it is unlikely that Marshal de Bono will find it necessary to summon such assistance.

Let us now review the Abyssinian side of the question, with regard to personnel and preparations. It is impossible to estimate with any degree of accuracy the number of men Haile Selassie can put into the field,

still less the number and quality of the armaments which will be at his disposal. The Emperor himself has an Imperial Guard numbering 6,000 men and a regular army consisting of 30,000 men who have been trained by Swedish and Belgian officers. This represents the flower of the Ethiopian army. In the provinces there are said to be another 100,000 "regular" troops, owing their allegiance to the various governors appointed directly by the Emperor. In this connection it is safe to assume that the provincial "regulars" will maintain their loyalty to the Emperor—although there will be some risk of minor Rases transferring their loyalty to Mussolini as a result of bribes and intrigues. Even in Menelik's day there was considerable internal dissension in the Empire, but Abyssinia was united to a man when General Baratieri launched his attack. Haile Selassie, who has been at pains for years past to consolidate his position in the provinces, is confident, as he assured me personally at Harar, that every Abyssinian man and woman would go out to die to save the independence of their ancient heritage.

In addition to these provincial "regulars," whose efficiency can only be guessed at, seeing that few of them, excepting the Harar contingent, have been trained by European officers, there is said to be another 700,000 men who can be speedily mobilized by the individual Rases, once the beacons have blazed from mountain top to mountain top, and the drums of war have sounded the call to arms throughout the land. No one doubts the vast numbers that Haile Selassie will be able to hurl at his attackers, but the really vital issue is that of armaments. It is said that there are 800,000 rifles in Abyssinia. Of this number at least 400,000 can be immediately discounted as being of such antiquated pattern (some date from Adowa, others were presented in a shipload by the Czar Alexander III)

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as to be of little practical value in modern warfare. It is doubtful whether ammunition could be found for them to-day. The Imperial Guard are said to be equipped with the latest Mauser rifles and perhaps another 10,000 soldiers of the standing army are similarly armed. While I was at Addis Ababa the question of an embargo being raised on arms and ammunition intended for Abyssinia was being discussed in Europe, and the decision to enforce this embargo had very seriously crippled the Emperor's resources for defence. The ammunition supplies were so small that even at manœuvres the troops were only allowed to fire one shot. At Addis Ababa two disused munition factories were being hurriedly re-equipped, but their contribution to the needs of a huge army such as the Emperor contemplated putting into the field would have been almost negligible. It is believed that the army possesses about 2,000 machine-guns of modern pattern and in addition a small number of anti-aircraft guns in the use of which the Abyssinians are entirely inexperienced.

In the matter of transport and communication the Abyssinians are not faced with the same difficulty as the Italians. The Abyssinian soldiers are world-renowned for their mobility and they will not require metalled roads, such as the Italians have been building for many months past, to enable them to move with rapidity from one part of the front to another. Several hundred lorries have been imported, via Berbera, in British Somaliland, and these will no doubt prove useful in those few districts where the rough tracks are suitable for heavy wheeled traffic. A more vital need, which may perhaps be rectified by the time hostilities open, is an adequate and efficient Medical Corps. Unless the International Red Cross can supply this deficiency the wounded will be left to die in the open,

as I have already pointed out, and the hyena will complete the unfinished work of the Italian machine-guns.

There remains only the air arm to be reviewed, and this can be dismissed at once, for no actual Abyssinian Air Force exists. The fifteen three-engined Fokkers which I have mentioned in a previous chapter were waiting for import licences when I arrived at Djibuti on my way home, and, as there were less than a dozen qualified pilots in the whole of Abyssinia at that time, it is doubtful whether they will ever leave their hangars. In any case the few fast fighting machines which Mussolini has sent to East Africa, with presumably a certain number of anti-aircraft guns as well, would make speedy work of attackers of this kind.

In this brief survey of the personnel and equipment of the two opposing forces I have not discussed in any detail the weapons which the Duce proposes to use in his assault on this primitive and comparatively unarmed people, because it has been openly and repeatedly declared by the Italians themselves that Italy will not hesitate to make use of all the devices that science has invented for the destruction of human life. The comparison in armaments, at a superficial glance, is fantastic, and without a closer knowledge of the geographical situation and other hazards with which this war will be fraught it is impossible to contemplate this spectacle of a modern David and Goliath without a feeling of loathing and disgust.

Any forecast of the probable plan of campaign to be followed by the Italians must necessarily be purely speculative. It is fairly certain that they will seek to engage the Abyssinians at as many points as possible, with the object of weakening the main body of the Emperor's forces. Their intimate knowledge of the country's topography, based on years of close study

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on the part of Italy's elaborate consular service in Abyssinia, will lessen the possibility of their being suddenly confronted with geographical obstacles on which they had not counted and which the enemy's tacticians would speedily put to good account. The Italians know well that the Ethiopian highlands can be penetrated at three points in the north, and three points in the south. The first of these, in the north, is on the extreme western border of Eritrea, due north of Gondar and Lake Tana. Here the Barraka-Gash Valley, which is fifty miles wide in places and at its narrowest nearly forty miles in width, offers an easy entry for an Italian army. It is not considered likely that Marshal de Bono will avail himself of this route, because for sentimental as well as strategic reasons the line running from Axum, the Holy City, to Adowa and Adigrat is of far greater importance to Italy. It is well known that the Duce lays great store on a swift and dramatic victory at Adowa, not only to heal an old wound, but also to strengthen the morale of the troops at the front as well as the people at home, at the very outset of the campaign. For this reason Marshal de Bono is likely to concentrate the main body of his northern army at this point and to make a spectacular dash on Adowa.

On the Abyssinian side, the Emperor, conscious of the sentimental value of Adowa to his enemies, would be less likely to offer stubborn resistance against a huge opposing force, lavishly equipped with aeroplanes, tanks and poison-gas. Although it is generally accepted that the Abyssinian warriors, mindful of their former victories over the Italians (Adowa is annually celebrated) as well as over the Egyptians and the Dervishes, are over-confident about their fighting prowess and at the same time are entirely ignorant of the rapid strides made in mechanical warfare since Adowa, the Emperor,

conscious of these dangers, has impressed upon his European officers the need to explain to his men that fighting by twos and threes, in scattered units, will be the surest way to victory against the Italians. He has no doubt also laid much stress on the value of retreat and leading the enemy as far from his base and source of supplies as possible, thereby weakening his lines of communication and giving opportunity for flanking and encircling movements in which Menelik was so expert.

The third vital point of attack in the north is at the south-eastern edge of Eritrea, in the neighbourhood of Assab, a short distance from the border of French Somaliland. Here the Italians are known to have concentrated a strong force together with a large number of aeroplanes. At this point the Italians will be confronted with climatic conditions which will tax the strongest constitutions as well as the most fervent Fascist spirits. The dread Danakil country which would have to be traversed in the long march to the highlands is populated (as the late L. M. Nesbitt so graphically described in *Desert and Forest*) by the fiercest tribes in the world. Their territory is scorched by a pitiless sun which gives temperatures of 167 degrees Fahrenheit, and the great "Plain of Salt," in places, is 400 feet below the level of the Red Sea.

The objective of this southern Eritrean expedition, which would advance simultaneously with General Graziani's movements in Somalia, would be Harar, by way of Dirre Dowa, where Abyssinia's source of supply from Djibuti could be cut off, and the way to Addis Ababa opened up. It is probable that bombers would be dispatched ahead of the troops to cut the railway communications further down the line where the Abyssinian border touches French Somaliland. To counter this line of advance, the Abyssinian forces would move eastward from Dessie, in the Wallo

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country, where it was said (while I was at Addis Ababa) that the Crown Prince was nominally in command of an army of 40,000 men. Dessye would be one of the most important strategic points in the north because it would serve as a position from which the Abyssinians could guard against attack from Assab and, in the event of De Bono making a rapid advance after capturing Adowa, these troops would act as a powerful reserve, together with other reinforcements in the province of Gojjam. It is possible that the Italian Commander-in-Chief may decide to confine his Assab activities to bombing, for fear of putting his men to too severe a strain in crossing the Danakil deserts, and in this event the Emperor would have many more troops at his disposal for his northern and southern defences.

In Somalia there are three possible lines of advance, by which General Graziani can lead his troops north-east and north-west, across the Ogaden desert, into the territory of the *Negus Nagasti*. Two of these follow the valleys of rivers, the Juba and the Webbe Shibeli. The other would strike across the wells of Wal Wal in a north-westerly direction towards Harar. Whether General Graziani would risk dividing his army into three widely separated lines of advance seems doubtful, although it is known (and as I had observed myself) that for the last six months he has concentrated in building roads towards the frontier along these three routes. It has been suggested that after the fall of Adowa a large part of the northern army would be transferred by sea to the south, from where progress would be much quicker than in the mountainous regions of Wollo and Shoa. It is certain that Haile Selassie with his ill-equipped and untrained soldiers would not risk meeting General Graziani in an open encounter in the Ogaden, where guerrilla tactics would be difficult and the aeroplane might prove the decisive



factor. But at the same time it would be an unwieldy operation to move a great army, with all its stores and European encumbrances, from Eritrea to Somaliland where the three ports of Bendir Cassim, Mogadiscio and Chisimaio are unsuitable for disembarkation owing to the monsoons and the poorly equipped nature of their harbours.

The objective of these southern armies would be Harar, the Emperor's own province, conquered by his father, Ras Makonnen, and therefore regarded by him in a particularly sentimental light. The Italians would be confronted with the problem of water supplies but they possess very accurate maps of the wells of the Ogaden and they may be able to overcome this difficulty. November, too, will form a testing month for the movements of European troops in this sector owing to the prevalence of fever. A double advance on Harar, from Assab in the north, and along the Webbe Shibeli in the south, would undoubtedly tax the Emperor's resources very severely indeed and would seriously weaken his defences along the Axum-Adowa-Adigrat front. The main difficulty the Emperor has to face, however, is that of having to divide his defensive campaign into two commands. The communications between north and south are very poor indeed and progress would be slow for his lorries if he decided to move his armies from north to south, or vice versa.

Haile Selassie, of course, will assume the Supreme Command and he will keep in immediate touch with each of his commanders by aeroplane. His almost simultaneous appearance on four or five fields of battle will greatly hearten his devoted troops. Ras Seyoum will be in command of Tigré, a redoubtable old warrior and grandson of the Emperor John, who is expected to give Marshal de Bono much trouble; he would have at least 50,000 men under his command. Ras

## WHO WILL WIN?

Kassa, the Emperor's cousin, would hold some 60,000 men at Gondar in the far north-west of Abyssinia. In the event of Ras Seyoum having to fall back after the expected fall of Adowa, the two armies would probably join forces at Makale, the northern G.H.Q. The Crown Prince, nominally in command of 40,000 men at Dessye, and Ras Nassibu, in command of the Harar Division in the south, with only 40,000 men at his immediate disposal, completes the numbers of the regular armies. All these figures, of course, would be considerably increased in the event of general mobilization, but the fact remains that, apart from the grave shortage of arms and ammunition, most of the Emperor's lieutenants (excluding his European advisers) are totally inexperienced in the methods of modern warfare and have never fought against Europeans. There are military critics who will say that this may prove an advantage for the Abyssinians for they will be compelled to resort to those tactics in which they have proved themselves so cunning and formidable in the past. In this war of "ifs" no one can say what strange and unexpected turns of the wheel of Fate may take place, for there has been no war quite like it in history and it may prove to be the last war of its kind the world will see.

It is impossible to say, at the distance of time at which I am writing, that Italy will win or that Abyssinia will win. There are too many "ifs." If aircraft and poison-gas play the part expected of them by Mussolini, it may prove a victory in the long run for Italy. But I think it will be a very long run. If they advance slowly, in easy stages, carefully consolidating their positions as they penetrate further into the heart of Abyssinia, they may, in four years or more, finally conquer the Ethiopians. If the Abyssinians were foolish enough to meet the foe in open combat *en masse*,

## ABYSSINIAN ADVENTURE

Haile Selassie's fate would be sealed ; and if the seeds of discord should be sown amongst the jealous Rases, might they not seize their opportunity to turn the tables on the King of Kings ? On the other hand, if the Emperor's guerrilla tactics are pursued over a long and trying period they may result in such a protracted campaign that Mussolini, after a few spectacular victories and capturing a small amount of territory in Tigré and Ogaden, would be compelled to withdraw his troops and face bankruptcy and ruin at home. If disease should break out, if the Four Horsemen should be seen winging their way across those blazing skies, if the *morale* of the troops should become affected, public opinion at home might well decide the issue and the will of the great Dictator would have to bend to forces greater than bombs and poison-gas.

But there is yet another "if" which may stalk across the far plains of Tigré, and stalk too beneath the windows of Mussolini's palace in the Piazza Venezia, . . . the dreaded spectre of Hunger. The cry for Bread may go through the land, calling for a halt to this mad adventure. How long can Mussolini's purse stand the strain ? The cost has already been staggering. The budget deficit has been increasing in leaps and bounds since 1930. For the year 1933-1934 it had reached a total of £108,000,000. There is said to be £72,000,000 of gold lying in the vaults of the Bank of Italy. To lay minds who do not understand the ways and means of high finance, that figure conveys little. But the experts say that even this colossal amount cannot suffice beyond June of 1936, when the rains commence again in East Africa. If Mussolini has no money with which to buy his cotton, his coal, his wool, his copper, his oil, what will happen in Abyssinia ? And in Italy ?

But again, these are only "ifs."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### FINALE

“**S**UDDENLY, without any warning, the whole *fantasia* abruptly ended.” The time had come all too soon for me to bid adieu to Addis Ababa, to Abyssinia, and these charming Abyssinians. The telegram from Northcliffe House was in my hand : *You have done excellently, but come home now as soon as possible.* I suppose I should have felt glad that one’s efforts had been appreciated, and that now, after four months of this astonishing existence, at moments so intoxicating, at others so indescribably boring (there is no boredom, after all, like tropical boredom) . . . when I looked back at that extraordinary procession of days dedicated, in the first instance, to the preparations for war, and when I re-read in my diaries how utterly different to my expectations those days proved in their unfolding . . . perhaps I should have felt glad that now the time had come to awaken from this feudal dream, to obliterate this Fascist nightmare from my remembrance. I was sorry. Not because I had left unseen all those things I had hoped to see ; the rock-hewn churches of Lalibala, the mysterious monoliths of Axum, the imperial remains at Gondar, the forty-four churches, the Palace of Rainbows, the Tower of Love, the tree where fifty malefactors were hanged at one time, at the old Portuguese capital in the north. . . . I had seen none of these things. It is good to leave many things unseen on one’s first visit to a distant land, for then there is the pleasure of looking forward to the return visit. But what would a return visit to Ethiopia

hold in store? Propagandist cathedrals thrusting their Fascist towers to the sky; tiny Ethiopian boys and girls waving foreign flags and shouting "Duce! Duce! Duce!"; proud Rases and chieftains of yesterday, with their trotting entourage, scuttled off the *autostradas* to permit the young Roman bloods to flash by, the Lion of Judah emblems defaced, and S.P.Q.R. written in their stead? I think it was pardonable to feel more than a twinge of regret at leaving Abyssinia.

"Ras" Makonnen was inconsolable when I sent him down to the station to get the tickets. He would work for me without wages, his brother would pay his fare to Europe, he would ask the Emperor's permission to go to England, he would become a monk and retire from the world if I didn't take him with me. Eventually I took him as far as Djibuti. His first sight of the sea and ships seemed to compensate him for my departure, and when I gave him a photograph of the Emperor and myself taken at Harar, he assured me that he would always carry it nearest his heart. At Awash the cats were still keeping high festival. They were wondering, perhaps, how the Duce would grapple with *their* overpopulation problem. At Dirre Dowa my Somali escort met me and, with his hefty friends singing a kind of war march, conducted me safely to the train next morning. Before we reached the coast we were delayed for nearly two hours by a sandstorm. At Djibuti the biggest coffee-dealer in the town had just committed suicide, and the Italian Consul was wondering whether he would ever again see the £200 he had lent him.

The *Adolf Woerman* was, of course, three days late. The wait was unbearable. The homing urge was definitely upon me, and in desperation I read the *communiqués* from Rome: "Another troopship left Naples yesterday with 3,000 troops for East Africa." Mussolini was still raving about Italy's "sacred mission"

## FINALE

and declaring that "war is to man what maternity is to woman." He was saying, too, that the English had built their Empire on "a mountain of bones." The English characteristically replied that that was in the days before the League of Nations. Geneva appointed fresh sub-committees and put the finishing touches to its new theme song, *Half a League, Half a League Onward*. Mr. Eden's photograph, leaving for, or arriving back from, Geneva (wearing the same hat), decorated the daily papers with exasperating persistency. So it went on.

At last the *Adolf Woerman* arrived. It was almost too good to be true. A week later I was standing spell-bound before the treasures of Tutankhamen. No less bewildered, I looked down from an Imperial Airways liner, on my way from Alexandria to Brindisi, and marvelled that it was possible to have breakfast, lunch and tea at a hundred miles an hour two thousand feet above a sea that shimmered in the heat like satin. At one minute the Acropolis, a few hundred feet below, hovered between earth and sky like an eternal beacon of Faith and Hope to troubled Greece; and then, when the brown mountains of the Balkans were left behind, we looked down upon Corfu sprawling lazily in the crystal sunlight. I remembered then the words of Signor Grandi, referring to the Corfu incident of 1923: "At Corfu the Duce fired his gun, not to intimidate Greece, but to intimate to Europe that it was time to halt for a moment to consider Italy's international position before the tension created in Italy by the wrongs done her in Paris reached the danger-point. By so doing he made the first real contribution to European peace." And it was the first warning of what was to come thirteen years later.

In the Eternal City a Roman calm still prevailed. Everybody was away at the sea. *Fraises du bois* were

## ABYSSINIAN ADVENTURE

in season. Two English martyrs had recently been elevated by an Italian to the community of Saints, but in other respects the English were not too popular. Signor Virginio Grayda had discovered that Great Britain was preparing a secret attack on Abyssinia via the Sudan. It was indicated elsewhere in the Italian Press that unless England behaved herself, Italy would seize Malta. The toy shops displayed mock battles between lead soldiers showing the Abyssinians being mown down by the Italians. People were beginning to read their Italian history books again, and they were surprised to find that Adowa was not really a defeat for the flag of Savoy at all. Marvellous are the ways of the *Ministero per la Propaganda*. More marvellous still is the credulity of forty million Italians.

In London I found that they had a new name for people like myself who had long held the view that Italy should be restrained from her madness, not only for the sake of Abyssinia, but for the security of European peace. We were called "bellicose pacifists." The posters said, "Mussolini Rejects Peace Offer." The walls and pavements of the West End, even the steps of No. 10 Downing Street, were covered with the latest slogan: "Keep out of it." My first evening in town I dined at a West End restaurant, a penance I only permit myself just before leaving for, or just after returning from, abroad. There was a cabaret turn. It was very feeble patter by the latest "rage of the town" comedian, whose name was new to me. He brought the house down twice. First, when he made his entrance, he threw up his arms and exclaimed, "Wal Wal!" For his exit, however, he reserved the *bon mot* of the evening, "Well, Aby-ssin-ia."

It was a huge joke.

THE END







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